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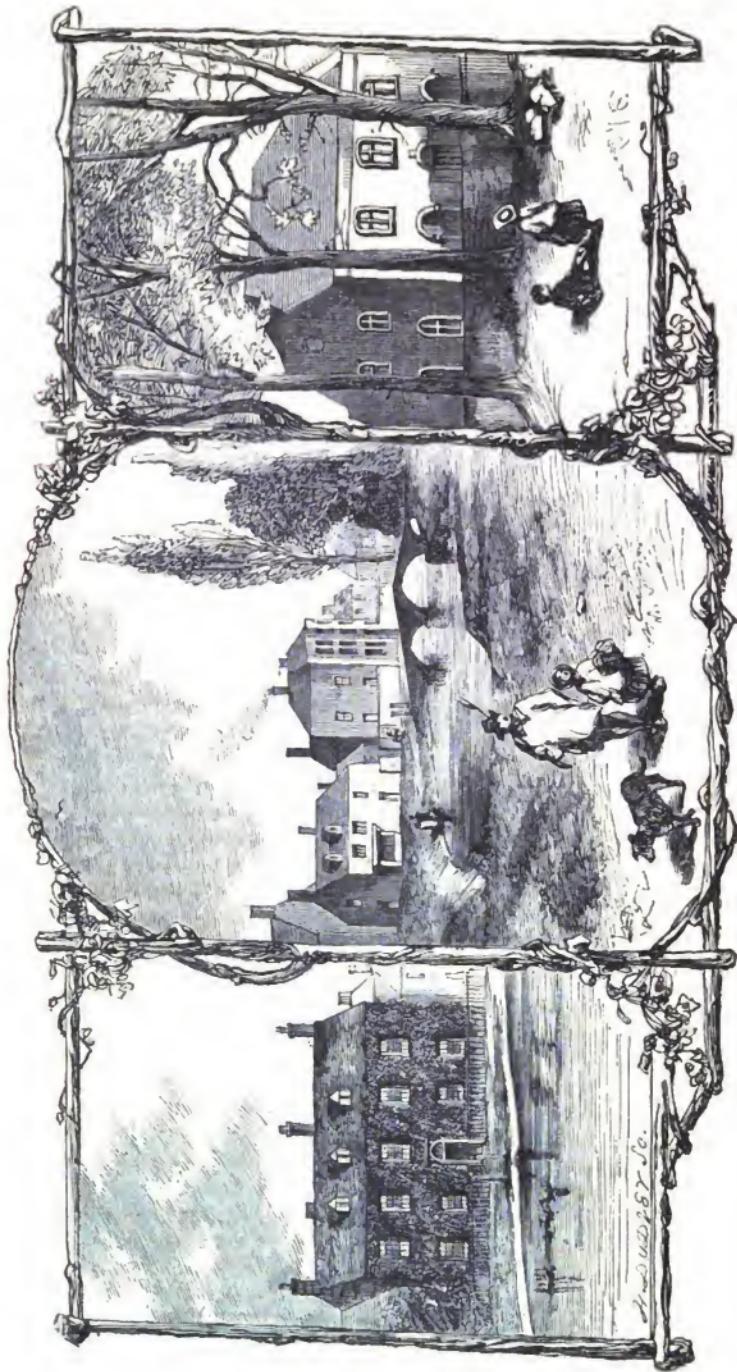
CHAPEL.

BOURTON-ON-THE-WATER.

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PICTURES OF THE PAST:

THE

HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH,

BOURTON-ON-THE-WATER.

BY

THOMAS BROOKS.

"For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers."—BILDAD.

LONDON:

JUDD & GLASS, NEW BRIDGE STREET.

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MDCCCLXI.



INTRODUCTION.

WE are told that in the East many rich men divide their goods into three parts : one they employ in commerce, or for their necessary support ; one they turn into jewels, which, in case of flight, could be easily carried with them ; a third part they bury. Something like this has occurred in relation to what is

“ More precious than silver or gold.”

Our fathers buried what, if disinterred and put into circulation, might interest and improve their children. The All-wise God has plainly declared His will that “ his wonderful works that he hath done ” should not be hidden : “ For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children ; that the generation to come might *know* them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children ; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.”*

The author of the following pages was often struck by the appearance of what he “ looked not for,” while turning over the records of this Church. Sometimes his spirit was stirred in him, as he thus communed with those who had gone before him. Sometimes subdued and softened, and anon aroused

* Psalm lxxviii. 5—7.

and strengthened, he has blessed the memory of the dead, and asked, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”

Now and then an incident from this source was used to illustrate some topic in the pulpit. Many persons expressed a wish to know more of the church of the past; and the author was at length told that he *ought* to search out and “set in order” the “pictures of the past.” This he has attempted. They are photographs—*uncoloured*. Of course the interest attaching to this small volume is local and limited. Should the author be charged with rashness and presumption, he may at least plead “*limited liability*”—a considerable number of subscribers having guaranteed the sale of no small number of copies. The author is indebted to a “*Memoir*” of Mr. Beddome, published with a volume of his sermons, for some facts relating to his early life—to a “*Memoir*” of Mr. Coles, by the late Rev. B. S. Hall, for similar information in his case, and to the “*Nonconformist Memorials*,” for some facts relative to Anthony Palmer. With these exceptions, the facts are drawn from the Church books. The preparation of this little work for the press has been a “labour of love,” and with the humble hope that it may be read with interest and profit, the author commends it to the favour and blessing of Him “who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

BOURTON-ON-THE-WATER, Feb. 21, 1861.

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THE
HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH,
Bourton-on-the-Water.

CHAPTER I.

Meeting at Slaughter—The Church in 1655—Rev. Anthony Palmer—Revs. J. Collet and J. Head—Persecutions and Penalties—Royal Clemency—Chapel Built—Church Dissolved and Re-formed. (1655—1720.)

WHEN the first church composed of Nonconformists residing in this locality was actually formed we cannot say with certainty. Puritans are known to have resided at Bourton, and in surrounding places, very early in the 17th century. A meeting for spiritual conversation and prayer was held at Slaughter in the beginning of it. In 1750, Mr. Beddome wrote as follows—

“That there has been in these parts a dissenting people for 150 years, Mr. Reynolds Senior proves from the words of his grandfather, who was of a great age when he was a boy, and said that when he was a youth, he used to carry his grandmother to a meeting of Puritans at Slaughter, where they had used to assemble for spiritual conversation and prayer. Now from a computation of his own age and that of his grandfather, his great-great-grandmother must have attended at those meetings about 150 years ago.”

We have no evidence that at that period they had forsaken the Established Church, and formed

themselves into a separate society, but in the time of Oliver Cromwell there was a Baptist church, regularly constituted, existing at Bourton-on-the-Water. This church belonged to an Association of Baptist churches which met at Warwick on the fourth of March, 1655. The churches whose ministers and messengers met on that occasion, were situated at Warwick, Moreton-in-Marsh, Bourton, Tewksbury, Hook-Norton, Derby, and Alcester.

That they were all Baptist churches there can be no manner of doubt. At that meeting sixteen articles of faith and order were assented to. The 13th and 14th read as follows—

“13th. That all those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, and make the same appear by their fruits, are the proper subjects of baptism. Matt. xxviii. 18, 19”

“14. That this baptism is not by sprinkling, but dipping of the persons in the water; representing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. (Rom. vi. 3, 4; Col. ii. 12; Acts viii.”

The church at Bourton was represented on that occasion by Henry Collins, Joseph Mitchel, and Anthony Collett. Soon after this a change came over the circumstances and character of this church. The Rev. Anthony Palmer, M. A., who held the “living” in the established Church at Bourton, was ejected from it in 1660, and at once became pastor of the Dissenting Society. He was not a Baptist, and from this time the church consisted of Baptists and Pedobaptists in one communion.

We are not surprised that Mr. Palmer could not continue in the “Church.” He seems to have been a man of vigorous and independent mind. He was educated at Oxford, and some time a Fellow of Balliol College. But he proved a rebellious son. Before his ejection he published a work entitled, “A Scripture-Rale to the Lord’s Table.” This was

intended to answer a treatise by one Mr Humphreys, entitled, "An Humble Vindication of free Admission to the Lord's Supper." The late Mr. Beddome bequeathed a copy of this work (as he did his entire library of some 400 vols.) to his successors at Bourton. It discovers considerable ability, correct knowledge of the word of God, and is so seasoned with smartness as to contrast favourably with many works of that age. In answering Mr. H., he says, "First, as to his preface, he saith, '*He is forced to serve in more words than enough.*' We believe it true, for it were better, we dare say, he had said nothing; and for his prayer, 'That if his book grieve any of the Lord's little ones (as we believe it doth thousands), that the Lord would blot out his sermon and his sin.' Answer. Amen."

To this volume Joseph Caryl attached his *Imprietum*, July 15, 1653. Besides this, Mr. Palmer published "Memorials of Godliness and Christianity;" "The Christian's Freedom by Christ;" "The Gospel New Creature," and several sermons, entitled, "The Tempestuous Soul Calmed by Jesus Christ." The historian of the period says, concerning his ejection, "He was cast out by force by some of the neighbouring gentry. He put in a curate who also was disturbed for want of the common prayer."

How long he held the office of dissenting minister at Bourton we cannot tell. We are, however, informed that he removed to London, where he continued his ministry until his death; which occurred January 26, 1678. Suggestive are the facts which thus conduct us to the root of Nonconformity in Bourton-on-the-Water.

Mr. Palmer was succeeded by the Revs. John Collett and Joshua Head, who were joint pastors for several years. Of this period we know but little,

and, unhappily, we could wish that little less. We have seen how the shepherd suffered loss, we shall now see how the sheep were worried. Nonconformity, though despised, was costly. In the interest of the "poor man's church," Benjamin Hyett, and Richard Parsons, Esqs., proceeded to levy moneys upon certain poor men, who preferred the principles and practices of the Nonconformists; and not a few in Bourton and its vicinity were made sensible of their power. Penalties were inflicted upon them for not coming to church, or not receiving the Lord's Supper. For these causes many were mulcted. In the year 1685, Edward Bulstrode, Esq., of Tewksbury, paid fifty pounds in behalf of the following, viz., Joshua Head, and William Green, of Slaughter; Thomas Collett, William Kyte, Peter Harbert, and Samuel Boswell, all of Bourton; John Truby, and Richard Reynolds, of Clapton; Anthony Freeman, and Thomas Bradley, of Guyting; William Wood, of Barton; Walter Johnson, of Swell; and Thomas and George Callaway, of Dunnington. It may be pleasing to find that there was one whose sympathy with the oppressed led him to pay down fifty pounds in their behalf; but it is *not* pleasing to find that while one solitary sovereign found its way into the Exchequer, forty-nine others were detained in their own hands, by Benjamin Hyett, Esq., and Richard Parsons, Esq.

Nor were the above named the only persons in this locality who thus suffered for conscience sake, and some were more than once called upon to pay for their principles. During the disgraceful reign of Charles II. this appears to have been a common thing in the county of Gloucester. In some cases the bill was heavy, and must have been the cause of deep distress. To render it the more vexatious, there came out the fact, that in many cases not a

penny of the money paid found its way into the Exchequer. Such was the fact in the cases following.

		£	s.	d.
John Hyett, of Stowe, fined	...	5	0	0
Matthew Freeman, , "	...	24	17	0
Widow Bryan, , "	...	2	10	0
John Tidmarsh, Addlestrop, ,	...	12	10	0
Widow Gay, of Oddington, ,	...	1	10	0
Robert Heydon, , "	...	10	4	0
Thomas Hankes, , "	...	5	10	0
Richard Brooks, , "	...	0	6	0
James Beale, , "	...	0	16	0
Ann Hayward, , "	...	0	13	0
John Gay, , at sundry times	14	15	0	
Anthony Freeman, Guyting, second time	...	13	0	0
John Truby, Clapton	...	7	3	0
Thomas Cook, Bourton-on-the-Hill	...	6	8	0
Job Greening, Bourton-on-the-Hill	...	38	16	0
John Hall, Broadwell	...	4	17	0
Thomas Barker, Broadwell	...	5	0	0
William Barker	...	5	5	0
Richard Lambe, Guyting	...	6	5	0
William Wane, Fairford	...	17	2	0
John Collett, Upper Slaughter	...	8	10	0

It is well known that James the Second, soon after his accession to the throne, assumed the power of dispensing in some cases with the penal laws. Some of the persons named above, and others in this county, were sharers in his clemency. It may be well to preserve a specimen of a document which strikes us as a strange thing. Here it is—

“ JAMES REX,

“ Whereas we have received good testimony of the peaceable behaviour of the persons mentioned in the list hereunto annexed. We have thought fit hereby to signify our will and pleasure unto you, that they, nor any of them, shall not be prosecuted, or molested for not taking, or refusing to take the oath of allegiance and supremacy, or either of them—or upon the prerogative writ called the long writ of the exchequer, for the penalty of twenty pounds *per*

mensem, or upon outlawries or other processes or writs *de excommunicato capiendo*, or other writs, or processes for the causes aforesaid, or for not coming to Church, or not receiving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or by reason of their conviction for recusancy, or exercise of their religion, nor otherwise prosecuted as recusants, nor imprisoned for any of the causes aforesaid. And we do accordingly command you, and every of you, in your respective places to absolve, discharge, and set at liberty all and every the said persons, and forbear all prosecution, and cause all process, and proceedings whatsoever already commenced and issued for, upon, or by reason of any the causes aforesaid against them, or any of them, their, or any of their lands, goods, and chattels, to be wholly superseded, discharged, and stayed until our royal pleasure shall be further known and signified unto you. And for so doing this, or the entry or enrolment thereof with you respectively, shall be unto you and every one of you respectively, a sufficient warrant. Given at our court at Whitehall, the 17th. day of December, 1686, in the second year of our reign.

By his majesties command.

SUNDERLAND P.

"To all Archbishops, and Bishops, and to all others exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and to our Judges, and Justices of assize and gaol delivery, Justices of the Peace, Sheriffs, Mayors, Bayliffs, and all other officers and persons whom it may concern."*

Among the persons whose names were included in the list annexed to this document were the following, viz., Richard Lambe, of Guyting; William Preston, of Salperton; William Evans, of Notgrove; John Arkell, of Turk-Dean; William Greenway, of Maugersbury; John Guy, William Hawkes and Ann Allen, of Oddington; John Tidmarsh, of Addlestrop; Mary, the wife of John Collett, of Upper Slaughter; Giles Watkins, Robert Wilkins senior, and Thomas Sowerby, of Cirencester; Thomas Collett, of Bourton, *Super Aquam*; Peter Herbert, Samuel Boswell, and William Kyte, junior, of the same; Richard Reynolds, and John Truby, of

* Church Book, Bourton-on-the-Water.

Clapton; George Callaway, of Dunnington; Joshua Head, senior, and Joshua Head, junior, of Lower Slaughter.

The facts we have now narrated, which lay bare to us a most unhappy social condition have one pleasing aspect—they shew very clearly that our ancestors were not “reeds shaken with the wind;” they considered before they bought, and were prepared to pay the price of truth. Of such an ancestry we may well be proud. How long Messrs. Collett and Head held their joint pastorate we do not know. All we know of the period of their ministry, is that they and their people were “robbed and spoiled.”

Having stood the storm of the seventeenth century, the eighteenth seems to have opened to them like a “fair haven.” They looked back gratefully, and girded themselves for more peaceful exploits. In the year 1701 we find them erecting a chapel. This they did after “taking into serious consideration, in this day of liberty and free publication of the Gospel, what might contribute to the honour of Almighty God, promote the interest of the Gospel, with the establishment thereof amongst us, and conveying of it to posterity.” The house they built could not have been “*exceeding magnifical*,” inasmuch as the sum subscribed was £90 11s. Od., and after all the bills were paid a balance in hand of £2 19s. Od. was paid by order of the subscribers into the hands of Mr. Samuel Boswell. William Kyte and John Reynolds were collectors, and the list of subscribers is full of interest, containing as it does many names which at Bourton and in the neighbourhood are daily on our tongues. We feel that we cannot let them lie forgotten longer, and therefore give them “small and great.”

“Subscriptions for the erecting of a place, meet and convenient for the solemnising of the sacred worship of God, at the town of Bourton-on-the-Water.”

		£	s.	d.
Thomas Collett, Nethercott	...	5	0	0
John Collett	...	5	0	0
John Hanman	...	5	0	0
Andrew Paxford	...	5	0	0
William Kyte	...	6	9	0
Samuel Boswell	...	4	0	0
William Paxford	...	5	0	0
John Compton	...	5	0	0
John Reynolds	...	5	0	0
William Truby	...	2	0	0
William Brown	...	2	10	0
Edward James	...	2	3	0
William Fox	...	2	0	0
John Fox junior 1200 laths	...	0	15	0
Thomas Sadler	...	0	5	0
John Fox, senior	...	2	0	0
Thomas Blissard	...	0	5	0
Mrs Ann Collett	...	0	10	0
Mrs Ann Dickinson	...	0	10	0
Thomas Powell	...	4	0	0
John Truby	...	4	0	0
Thomas Tombs	...	1	10	0
Mary Rooke	...	2	10	0
Robert Lombard	...	1	0	0
Thomas Collett	...	2	0	0
Paris Collett	...	2	0	0
John Arkill	...	1	5	0
William Preston	...	0	10	0
Richard Collett	...	1	10	0
John Collett	...	1	0	0
Joseph Lawrence	...	1	0	0
Peter Harbert	...	2	3	0
Anon	...	0	10	0
Robert Gladwin	...	0	10	0
Thomas Collett	...	0	10	0
John Hall	...	1	1	6
Mrs Hinton	...	0	5	0
Goody Maisy	...	0	5	0
Widow Coocke	...	1	0	0
William Bradly	...	0	5	0
Mrs. Henry Collett	...	1	1	6
Edward Warkeman	...	1	1	6
Simon Auswell	...	0	5	0
<hr/>				
		£	90	11 0

The disbursements are set down on the same page, and the whole account was rendered to a meeting of the subscribers, held September 26, 1701.

We now approach a period which forms an epoch in the history of the church at Bourton. It is to be regretted that we are not furnished with a more extended account of what transpired during the last twenty years of the seventeenth, and the first twenty years of the eighteenth century. As it is, we must be thankful that though surrounded by a heavy fog, we can now and then clearly discern an important landmark. What had occurred relative to the Rev. T. Collett we are not informed, but we find that in 1719, the Rev. Joshua Head had "finished his course." The probability is, that the Church, which from the year 1660, when the Rev. Anthony Palmer became its pastor, included Baptists and Pedo-baptists, had become two bands. And it is further evident, that while Mr. Collett was the pastor of the Pedo-baptist Church, Mr. Head was the pastor of the Baptist.

That there was at Bourton, during the early part of the eighteenth century, a Pedo-baptist Church, and that Mr. Collett was its pastor, there can be no doubt. When it ceased to exist we are not informed; but in the records of the Baptist church we find the following minute, viz., "1748. Agreed, that if any of the members of the Pedo-baptist church in this place, formerly under the care of Mr. Thomas Collett, should propose for baptism and fellowship with us. If their walk had been honourable we would not insist upon a renewed confession of their faith and declaration of their experience. Because, having been received upon that footing before, a fresh demand of the same would be a reflection upon the Church to which they belonged, and the minister under whose care they were." And again, "1750.

Received into the Church, Elizabeth Collett, of Cold Aston, formerly a pious member of Mr. Thomas Collett's Church, a woman of large experience, and excellent conversation, lately convinced of baptism."

These are the last and only references we shall find to facts which are suggestive of many thoughts; and which could not properly be passed over in silence. Let us hope, that the separation was attended by nothing that would disturb the peace of the venerable men, when one by one they were laid upon the bed of death.

We must now return to our friends of the Baptist church, and having before seen them "zealously affected" in chapel-building; we shall now behold them engaged in the more spiritual work of re-organizing the Church. January 30, 1719—20, was a high day at Bourton-on-the-Water. It was signalised by a solemn assembly not soon to be forgotten. It formed the epoch of which we have already spoken. The record of its transactions runs as follows

"We, whose names are tinderwritten, having being members, and much the major part, of a church or separate congregation, late under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. Joshua Head, deceased, and still desirous to walk together in all the ordinances of Jesus Christ, as much as may be, blameless (seeing that Church, by reason of different apprehensions of some of the brethren about the choice of a pastor, hath been, in the presence, and by the advice of some neighbouring ministers peaceably dissolved), do now freely, and heartily, give up ourselves afresh to God the Father, and his only Son, our Lord and Lawgiver, and to one another according to his will. And so become a new church, or sacred society, incorporated by the gospel charter; do now in the presence of God, and those that are here, witnesses of our order, unanimously agree in the name and fear of Christ—

I. That we will, to the utmost of our power, walk together in one body, and as near as may be with one mind, in all sweetness of spirit, and saint-like love to each other, as

highly becomes the disciples of Christ. John xv. 12—14, Rom. xiii. 8, Eph. v. 2, 1 Thess. iii. 12, 1 John iv. 21.

II. That we will jointly contend and strive together for the faith and purity of the gospel, the truth of Jesus Christ, and the order, ordinances, honour, liberty, and privileges of this, his church, against all opposers. Jude 3. Gal. v. 1—15, 2 Tim. i. 13, Rev. ii. 25.

III. That we will with all care, diligence, and conscience, labour and study to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, both in the church in general, and in particular between one another. Phil. ii. 1—3, I Cor. i. 10, Eph. iv. 3, 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

IV. That we will carefully avoid all causes and causers of division, as much as lies in us, and shun those that are seducers, and false teachers of errors and heresies. 2 John. 10, 1 Tim. vi. 3, Rev. xi. 14—20.

V. That we will sympathize and have a fellow-feeling (to our power) with one another in every condition; and endeavour to bear each other's burthens, where we are joyful or sorrowful, tempted or otherwise; that we may be mutual helps to one another, and so answer the end of our dear relation. Gal. vi. 2, Heb. xiii. 3, 1 Cor. xii. 25, 2 Tim. i. 16.

VI. That we will forbear, and bear with one another's weakness and infirmities in much pity, tenderness, meekness, and patience, not daring to rip up the weakness of any to those without the church; nor to those that are within unless it be according to Christ's rules and gospel order. Endeavouring all we can for the glory of the gospel, and for the credit of this church. Willing to hide and cover one another's slips and common failings that are not sinful. Eph. iv. 2, Rom. xiv. 13, xv. 1; Col. iii. 12, 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

VII. That we will as our God shall enable us, cleave fast to each other to the utmost of our power; and that if perilous times should come, and a time of persecution (which God for our non-proficiency may justly send), we will not dare to draw back from our holy profession, but will endeavour to strengthen each other's hands and encourage one another to perseverance, let what will fall to our lot. Heb. x. 23—39, 2 Tim. iv. 10, 16.

VIII. We do promise to keep the secrets of our church entire, without divulging them to any that are not members of our particular body, though they may be otherwise near and dear to us. For we believe the church ought to be as a garden enclosed and a fountain sealed. Sol. Song iv. 12, Prov. xi. 13, 1 Tim. v. 13.

IX. Those of us that are, or may be single persons, do fully desire never to enter into conjugal bonds with any that are unbelievers. For we believe it to be a sin to be unequally yoked, that it is contrary to the rule of Christ, and the ready way to hinder our soul's peace, growth, and eternal welfare. 2 Cor. vi. 14—18, 1 Cor. vii. 39, Mal. ii. 10, Ezra. ix. 2, Neh. xiii. 23—27, Gen. vi. 2, 3.

X. That we will communicate to one another of the good things of this life as God hath or may prosper us, so far as our ability will suffer, or any of our necessities shall be thought to require. Heb. xiii. 16, 2 Cor. i. 3—7., ix. ch. 1 John iii. 17.

XI. That we will endeavour to watch over one another's conversation for good. Not for each other's halting, yet not by any means to suffer sin to rest in the bosom of our brother; but to remove it by using all possible means to bring the person to repentance, and reformation of life. And we will endeavour to provoke one another to holiness, love and good works. Lev. xix. 17, Gal. vi. 1, Heb. x. 24.

XII. We do all purpose constantly to attend the meetings appointed by the church, both on the Lord's Days, and other days; nothing hindering except distance, sickness, or the works of mercy and necessity. Heb. x. 25, Acts. ii. 42—46.

XIII. That we will make conscience of praying for one another's welfare at all times, but especially in times of distress and poverty, sickness, pain, temptation, desertion, or the like. And that we will pray for the peace and growth of the whole church in general, and our ministers and the success of their ministry in an especial manner. 1 Cor. xii. 26, 2 Thess. iii. 1 2, Rom. xii. 15, Acts. xii. 12, 1 Thess. v. 25.

Signed at Bourton-on-the-water the 30th day of January 1719—20.

The names of twenty-four men and twenty-six women are annexed to this interesting document. The church contained therefore fifty members on that day. Considerable additions were made to that number. The triumphs of the gospel and the spread of their distinctive principles may be judged by the fact, that within three years from the formation of the church forty-seven members were added by baptism.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Flower—Mr. Beddome—Early Life, Probation, Ordination—Bourton and Stowe United—Parsonage Built—Invitation to Bristol—Chapel Enlarged. (1720—1748.)

WE have spoken of the Church, we regret that we cannot speak as certainly of the ministry of the same period. The only name that has come down to us is that of Mr. Flower, and the only reference to him is connected with a list of subscriptions promised for his support. It reads as follows—“Whereas we hope the worthy Mr. Flower purposes to settle with us as pastor, we whose names are underwritten do voluntarily and willingly subscribe to pay yearly for the support of his ministry, *viz.*” We know, from statements made subsequently, that the Church was destitute of a pastor for many years; and, in 1750, they testify that many of them could then remember the death of two or three pastors who were very eminent and valuable men. Thus much, and this is all, we know of the ministry of that age. But there was mercy in store for this people. They tell us that “notwithstanding their many cries to Almighty God, he was pleased to withhold direct answers of prayer, till at length he graciously raised up, eminently qualified, and unexpectedly sent, our dearly beloved and Rev. pastor, Mr. Beddome, to our assistance, and inclined him, after our many solicitations and calls, to become our pastor.”

This eminent man (the Rev. Benjamin Beddome)

was born at Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire, January 23. 1717—18. His father, the Rev. John Beddome, had purchased in that place a large house, which he fitted up partly for his own residence, and partly as a place of worship. When Benjamin Beddome was about seven years of age, his father removed to Bristol, where he became co-pastor with Mr. Beazely, of the Pithay church, in that city.

The son, after receiving a suitable education, was apprenticed to a Surgeon-apothecary in that city. Some twenty years of his life had passed away, when his heart was opened to attend to the things belonging to his peace. He thus records the event. "Mr. Ware, of Chesham, preached at the Pithay, Bristol, August 7. 1737, with which sermon I was, for the first, deeply impressed. Text, (Luke xv. 7.) 'Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.'" He heard the character of the penitent described, and it at once became his own. So intense were his feelings, that he selected the most retired part of the chapel to conceal his tears. He found much relief, we are told, in reading the Scriptures and in prayer; and soon the tears of penitence were dried up by the "Sun of Righteousness."

His own heart changed, he soon began to feel for the spiritual condition of others; and became desirous of devoting himself to the work of the ministry. With a view to this, at the close of his apprenticeship, he became a student in the Baptist College, Bristol, then superintended by the Rev. Bernard Foskett, who was formerly co-pastor with his father at Henley-in-Arden. Having pursued his studies for some time at Bristol, he removed to London, for the purpose of completing his education under the tuition of Mr. John Eamos, at the Independent Academy, in Tenter

Alley, Moorfields. Strange to say, he had not at that time become a member of any Christian church. Soon after his removal to London, however, he joined the Baptist church in Little Prescot-street, Goodman's Fields, under the care of the Rev. Samuel Wilson, by whom he was baptized in September or October, 1739. His father appears to have been a wise and faithful counsellor. The following is an extract from a letter written by him to his son about this time. "I am pleased to hear you have given yourself to a Church of Christ; but more, in that I hope you first gave yourself up to the Lord to be his servant, and at his disposal. And now, I would have you remember, that when Christ was baptized he was soon tempted of the devil; and I believe many of his followers, in that, have been made conformable to their Head. So also may you, therefore, of all the evils you may find working in your heart, especially beware of spiritual pride and carnal security."

According to the custom of the Baptist churches, he was requested to preach before the Church, and did so, January 9, and February 28, 1740. The result was, that the Church called him to the work of the ministry. His father seems to have thought this rather premature, and wrote to his son as follows :—

"May 21, 1740.

"DEAR BENJAMIN,

"I am sorry Mr. Wilson is in such a hurry to call you to the ministry. It would have been time enough just before you came away; but supposing it must be so, I think you should not preach in public above once or twice, at most, at your own place, and nowhere else, except Mr. Stennett, or his people, ask you, and if the latter do it, you may serve them as oft as their necessities require. The Lord, I hope, will help you to make a solemn dedication of yourself to him, and enter on the work of the Lord with holy awe and trembling. I hope to get sundry friends in this place to beg assistance for you, and a blessing, on Thursday next."

Thus did he continually. How much may these paternal counsels and fervent prayers have contributed to the eminence and usefulness which marked the career of his beloved Benjamin ! Nor were these faithful admonitions and wise counsels confined to what might be regarded as the weightier matters. He deemed nothing unimportant that stood related to the ministry, and might therefore either help or hinder its success.

It appears that Benjamin Beddome, like too many young preachers, fell into a hurried mode of delivery. The result was, that his voice, like a horse with the bit between his teeth, became unmanageable, while the effort of the preacher became painful to the hearer. His father became aware of it, as also of the fact that another evil habit was in process of formation, viz., that of making his sermons too long ; and came down upon him with great force, in two loving letters. We take from them the following extracts—

“ BRISTOL, May 17, 1742.

“ MY DEAR BENJAMIN,

“ I wish from my heart I could prevail with you not to strain your voice so much in the delivery of your sermons ; and if you would make them shorter, and less crowded with matter, it would be more acceptable and edifying to your hearers, and more safe and easy for yourself. Strive, then, to comply with this advice, which is given in great affection, and, I think, with judgment. If you deliver the great truths of the gospel with calmness, and with a soft, mellow voice, they will drop as the gentle rain or dew. For the good of souls, then, and for your own good, be persuaded to strive after this.”

“ August 6, 1742.

“ MY DEAR BENJAMIN,

“ I cannot but advise, and carefully press you, to strive with all your might to soften your voice, and shorten your sermons ; for it would be better both for you and your hearers. I say this, not merely from myself, but from many of the most judicious I know. I lately heard a great man say, that if you could deliver the matter you produce

in the same manner as Mr. Evans, you would be more popular and useful than ever you are likely to be if you retain your harsh mode of speaking. Mr. Grant, not four days ago, said the same things in other words; and I well know, that those of your people, who have the best sense, (*i.e.* common sense) have said to several, that if you would strain yourself less, and shorten your sermons, it would be better for all. What all say, give ear to. Of one discourse I beg you will make two, and so take care of your health and comfort. Let *two hours* be the longest time you spend in the pulpit at any place. This I leave as my special charge; and as I write with all the love and tenderness of a father, I hope you will consider these things."

Benjamin Beddome had probably read before he left home the fifth verse of the one-hundred-and-forty-first Psalm, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head;" and thinking this an opportunity for exhibiting his acquiescence in the sentiment, he largely profited by the kindness of his father; he held his voice with a tighter rein, and applied the scissors to his sermons.

During the period we have now reviewed, Mr. Beddome had repeatedly visited Bourton-on-the-Water. His first visit was paid in the Spring of 1740, and many persons were added to the church during the three years following. During this time his ministerial labours seem to have been divided between Bourton and Warwick. In July, 1743, the church at Bourton invited him to become their pastor. He had now to choose between Bourton and Warwick. Upon this subject his father writes—

"As to the continuance of your journeys between Bourton and Warwick, you are the best judge. If your strength will permit, and the people's desire remains strong, and there is a prospect of serving the interests of religion at both places, to my judgment, it may be best to continue some time longer; and if you pray fervently, and commit your way

to the Lord, you will see the leadings of his providence. 'The meek will he teach his way.' Take notice of the feelings you are subject to, and the assistance you obtain at each place, and consider where the gospel is most needed and most likely to be received, for that place will yield most satisfaction to a gracious mind. We are not so much to consult our own ease and pleasure, as to honour Him who made us, and promote His interests."

Having received many very pressing invitations from the church at Bourton to become their pastor, he at length acceded to their request, and was ordained September 23, 1743. On that occasion, Mr. Foskett, of Bristol, gave the charge to the pastor, (from 1 Tim. iv. 12. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity,") and offered the ordination prayer. Dr. Joseph Stennett preached to the people, from Heb. xiii. 17; and other parts of the service were taken by Messrs Haydon, Cook, and Fuller, of Abingdon. His venerable father was not present on this interesting occasion, owing to his incapacity for travelling, but sent the following letter, expressing the feelings and desires of his heart :—

"I should have been glad to have attended your ordination, but cannot. I never expect to travel so far on horseback more. I hope what you are about to take upon you, will be a stimulus to you, to walk more closely with God than ever, and make you more sincerely and simply concerned for the good of the souls of men. I desire, with my whole heart, that an unction of the Holy Spirit may be poured out upon you at the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery; and that your faith therein may be strong."

Our fathers were careful to state clearly, on such occasions, the engagement between the pastor and the church. In this case, a document was drawn up, adopted by the church, and signed by eighteen

of its members, in behalf of the whole, on the 16th day of September, 1743. The following is a copy.

“ We, the church of Christ meeting at Bourton-on-the-Water, Having solemnly called, and set apart, our beloved brother, Benjamin Beddome, to the office of teaching elder to us, do hereby declare, that we don’t intend to bring him under any such special obligation to us; but that if the providence of God calls him elsewhere, or he upon valuable considerations, doth desire his release from us, we will give up our right in him, as if he had never stood in any such relation to us. In witness whereof we have put our hands, &c.”

Well, it was something to know that they had not bored his ear through with an awl, and bound him to serve them for ever. It would be *possible* to get away.

Here it may be well to record the fact, that, shortly before the “fixing of their pastor, Benjamin Beddome,” the church at Stowe had become one with the church at Bourton. The transaction is thus recorded—

“ *Copy of a paper signed by the members of Stowe church, March 19, 1742—3.*

“ Whereas we, whose names are underwritten, (being formerly members of the Church of Christ meeting at Stowe, commonly known by the name of Baptists,) having by a church act dissolved ourselves, and looking upon ourselves no longer as a distinct church, have also made application to the Church of Christ meeting at Bourton for communion and fellowship with the said church. We do hereby confirm that our application, and profess, that we no longer look upon ourselves as a distinct body; but as members of the said church at Bourton, in conjunction with which we desire to be fed with the sincere milk of the word, and attend upon those ordinances which were instituted as well for the glory of the Redeemer, as the comfort of our souls.”

This document is signed by twenty-three persons,

male and female, and is followed by articles of agreement between Bourton and Stowe churches.

"I. No longer to look upon themselves as two distinct and separate bodies, but as one church ; and as members of that one church, reciprocally to watch over one another, pass church acts, exercise church discipline, &c.

"II. That the minister resident or preaching at Bourton, shall preach at Stowe in the afternoon one Lord's day in the month absolutely, and oftener, if providence order it so that the meeting at Bourton may be supplied at the same time.

"III. That as long as there may be any persons living about Stowe, who cannot comfortably sit down at Bourton and there partake of the ordinance of the Lord's supper, and are desirous to have that ordinance administered at Stowe ; it shall be so administered by the pastor of the church at Bourton, at the most expedient seasons, three or four times a year.

IV. That whenever there may be twenty or thirty members, living nearer Stowe than Bourton, having a prospect of being supplied with an orderly minister of the same persuasion, and desirous of re-embodying themselves ; a liberty shall be granted them to renew and keep up a separate church state, as before this union.

"V. That if any persons formerly belonging to Stowe church, shall refuse to comply with this act of that church ; and upon proper application, shall persist in their refusal, they shall be looked upon as withdrawing from the communion of the church, and their names expunged out of the list of members, unless they desire their dismission to any other church, which shall be granted them."

We are not surprised to find that this did not give perfect satisfaction. The Stowe people were certainly put upon very low diet. The result was that "after some time Stowe people complaining that one day in the month was not sufficient, and also proposing to raise something independent of Bourton, for the support of the ministry, if another opportunity might be granted them, it was agreed that they should be supplied twice a month. The minister not lessening his labours at Bourton on one of those days."

We must not forget that the "flock" of which

Benjamin Beddome had taken "the oversight" was spread over a spacious field. The Church contained about 100 members. They resided at Bourton, Lower Slaughter, Upper Slaughter, Naunton, Barton, Hawling, Saperton, Clapton, Farmington, Great Rissington, Little Rissington, Burford, Longborough, Dunnington, Swell, Stow, Broadwell, Icomb, Chipping Norton, and Hook Norton. The Church at Bourton was therefore composed of persons residing in twenty parishes—a fact often overlooked in the present day. We rejoice that it is not so now, our neighbours "have no such lengths to go, nor travel far abroad," because this mother-church sees her children rising all around.

When Mr. Beddome became pastor of the Church at Bourton he took up his residence at Lower Slaughter, in the house of Mr. Head, where he continued till September, 1749; but then, as he intended marrying, he removed to Bourton. A dwelling had been provided by his people some years before. "In 1741, the Church resolved to build a dwelling-house for the use of their minister, there being no convenient one either to be let or sold in Bourton for that purpose." Every item in the cost is carefully recorded, down to "odd things, bread, cheese, beer, &c." The sum total was something more than *three hundred and fifty pounds*. This sum, with the exception of about forty pounds from a few of Mr. Beddome's personal friends, was raised by the Church and congregation. Mr. Beddome has recorded every subscription (taking great care to preserve the identity of each donor), from "Mr. John Reynolds sen., £45 0 0" to "Molly Hanks, the Mantua-maker 2s. 6d." and "Nanny Strange, Joseph's daughter, 2s."

While Mr. Beddome was thus preparing to be married and *settled* at Bourton, his father was seek-

ing, with great perseverance to allure him to Bristol. Such was the estimate formed of the value of his labours, that he was warily solicited to become co-pastor of the Pithay church, Bristol. On this subject his father addressed many letters to him, one of which will show how earnestly he pleaded with his son.

“October 28, 1748.

“MY DEAR BENJAMIN,

“I wish from my heart, the Lord would incline you to come to this city. Here you would have a comfortable income, and a better people than you take them to be. They very much desire you, and are willing to make extraordinary efforts for your comfortable support. But my principal reasons, why I so much desire your removal are these:—(1.) It would save a large number of people from sinking. (2.) My children would be all together. (3.) It would be a great comfort to your poor *mother* to sit under your ministry. (4.) You would have less labour, an honest, good-hearted man to be your partner, much good conversation for your improvement, and an abundant harvest of souls, as well as anywhere else.”

“But none of these things moved him.” Seven years before this he had recorded his “*wish*,”

“My dwelling-place let Bourton be,
There let me live, and live to thee,”

• And he was “in one mind,” and none could turn him. In the “*wish*” named above, he had also said—

“Let the companion of my youth
Be one of innocence and truth;
Let modest charms adorn her face,
And give her thy superior grace.
By heavenly art first make her thine,
Then make her willing to be mine.”

These conditions appear to have been met in some measure, by Miss Elizabeth Boswell, to whom he was “joined in matrimony,” December 21, 1749.

She was the daughter of Mr. Richard Boswell, of Bourton, who was a deacon of the Church, and a most valuable man. Had this engagement anything to do with his determination to abide at Bourton? Did Miss Boswell strongly object to quitting the "Golden Valley" for the smoky city? When Mr. Beddome gave her that letter from his father, to read, and, with tears in his eyes, pointed out the reason No 3, involving the comfort of his "*poor mother*," did she smiling sweetly, say—"For this cause shall a *man* leave his father and his mother?" We cannot tell. It is not in evidence; but we cannot help thinking that the Church at Bourton was fortunate in having "specially retained" on their side Miss Boswell, instructed by her father. It was not a light thing, in a secluded village, to have secured for so many years the services of Benjamin Beddome.

And here we must not omit the fact, that prior to this event the chapel became too strait for the congregation, and being "very much decayed in several places, they resolved to pull down a great part of it, and enlarge and repair it." This was done at a cost of £118 15s. 6d. in the year 1748, costing more than the original chapel in 1701. It is pleasing also to perceive that this Church, favoured in the possession of an "*able minister*," was producing others who were destined to be the pastors of other churches. In 1750, the Rev. John Ryland, after repeated trials of his gifts, was dismissed to the Baptist church at Warwick, to become its pastor; and the Rev. Richard Haines, to the Church at Bradford, Wiltshire, for the same office there. In addition to these, Mr. John Reynolds, jun., "having been under the care of Mr. Foskett of Bristol," for the increase of his learning, "almost two years, was permitted by the Church to exercise his gift occasionally, till they saw fit to give him a more full and solemn call."

CHAPTER III.

Invitation to London—Second Application. (1750—1751.)

In the month of November, 1750, a second attempt was made to induce Mr. Beddome to leave Bourton. Mr. Wilson, his former pastor, had been removed by death, and Mr. Beddome was applied to to become his successor. The following is a copy of their letter :—

“ The Church of Christ, in London, lately under the care of the Rev. and learned Mr. Samuel Wilson, deceased, send their salutations to the Rev. Mr. Beddome, pastor of the Church of Christ at Bourton-on-the-water, in the county of Gloucester.

“ Rev. Sir,—

“ It is with great sorrow we mourn the loss of our beloved, laborious, and faithful pastor, and the present application is for your removal to London to succeed that excellent man. And this request we make with perfect unanimity, and the most strenuous importunity. The motives inducing us hereto we have stated in the remonstrance to the church accompanying this persuasive letter, and to which we beg leave to refer you, being well assured that those motives will have their due and proper weight. And if our ardent prayers in this case shall meet with success, we are ready to tender you the most unfeigned affection and esteem, with all the assistance and respect in our power.

“ In this important crisis we recommend you, Rev. Sir, to the God of heaven, and may you, after many years of increasing usefulness and service to the churches here, be able to face the great Searcher of hearts and say, ‘ Lord, thou deliverest unto me five talents; behold, I have gained besides them five talents more;’ and then may you enter

into the joy of your Lord. We are, desiring your favourable answer,

“Rev. Sir, your most affectionate servants,
“In the bonds of the Gospel,

[Signed by five Deacons and thirty Members.]

“Done in our Church-meeting, Nov. 11, 1750.”

The Remonstrance referred to above.

“The church of Christ in London, lately under the pastoral care of the Rev. and learned Mr. Samuel Wilson, deceased, send their affectionate salutations to the church of Christ at Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. B. Beddome.

“BELOVED IN THE LORD,

“The death of Mr. Wilson will always be considered by you, as well as by us his beloved church, as a very great and general loss—a loss never sufficiently to be deplored. His removal is not from a place of lesser to one of more extensive and apparent usefulness. No! he is gone for ever from our world. And we are well assured that a zeal and concern such as you have for the honour of God, for the purity of his worship, and for the duration, prosperity, and increase of the churches embracing the same faith and order with us, will give an equal fervour to your prayers and ours, that the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls will be pleased to repair the loss and supply the place of our late most excellent pastor.

“The very few learned and popular ministers now among us, compared with the other two denominations, the declining state of several of our churches here, and the carelessness of many professors with respect to themselves and their families, beside other unpromising symptoms, give a most sorrowful prospect to every pious mind, especially if we consider the rising generation, and how much the prosperity of most, and the very existence of many, of our churches in the country depends upon the assistance, reputation, and influence of those in London. We could be much more explicit upon this subject were there occasion, but enough is said to awaken your attention and to afflict your tender sympathising hearts. And though we are sensible of your deserved affection and love for the Rev. Mr. Beddome, your

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learned and faithful pastor, and how severe the parting stroke would be, yet our present business is to press for his removal to London, with an earnestness suitable to the importance and necessity of the case.

"To ask a minister in the country to leave his church is a most disagreeable task to us, notwithstanding it has, in many instances, been practised with success among all the three denominations here. Nor would we think ourselves warranted in the present case was there now a minister, besides Mr. Beddome, fit and proper in all respects to succeed that eloquent preacher whose death is so justly lamented by all the churches. And we put the merit of this application upon the foot of mere necessity. And were we to wait and see what time would do, our auditory (the most popular amongst us here) would in all probability disperse; the consequence of which must be very dangerous, and may terminate in our total dissolution. This, in all appearance, will soon be the case with the church late under the Rev. Mr. Dawks's care, though once a church of the greatest popularity and reputation.

"These considerations, together with the ministerial abilities of one of your own members, will, we trust, have their due weight, when you approach the throne of grace. And we will be solicitors at the same throne, that the removal of your pastor to more important services in the Churches may, in case of such removal, be sanctified, and issue in your greater comfort, establishment and joy. We now submit our case to God, the great disposer of all persons and events, earnestly desiring your favourable sentiments with as much dispatch as the nature of the case will admit. We are &c.,

"Done unanimously in Church Meeting, Nov. 11th, 1750."

The following is Mr. Beddome's answer to the letter addressed to him.

"To the Church of Christ in Goodman's Fields,
"London.

"DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

"The death of your late excellent pastor has filled me with the deepest distress and concern. And though I cannot but rejoice in his personal gain, being no doubt possessed of those glories which he so often and so eloquently displayed,

yet I look upon the mournful church, and bleeding interest which he has left behind him, with that sympathy and concern which are due upon such an occasion. I am not, I cannot be a thoughtless and uncompassionate spectator of so moving and afflicting a scene. Besides, I have my share in your loss. You have been bereft of a pastor, I of a faithful instructor and affectionate friend; so that I may join with you in saying, 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.'

"The result of this loss is an unanimous call to me to supply his place. A call of the utmost importance to you, as your spiritual welfare is concerned in it, and of the greatest moment to me, as the reproaches of a guilty conscience, either in refusing or complying, are the worst companions I can have both in life and in death.

"As for your plea of absolute necessity—that it is necessary that you should have a minister, I readily own, and heartily pray that God will direct you in your choice. But that it is equally so that I should be the man, I shall never see till I gave a greater opinion of my own abilities, or a much meaner of those of my brethren. Other motives there are for my removal which are considerably weighty and strong. You call me from a Church comparatively mean and laden with debt, to one popular, flourishing, and wealthy. You call me from a country, where I seldom enjoy the advantages of hearing and conversing with my brethren in the ministry, to a city where there are the best of preachers, and those united together by the bonds both of interest and affection. You call me from a Church to which you gave me, to a Church that first received me and called me into the ministry, and for which I still retain the sincerest regard. You call me from a place of little influence, to one of much greater, where you imagine my labours may be more profitably bestowed, and my usefulness much enlarged, and I confess that these are things mostly of consideration.

"So numerous and so liberal a Church demands respect. Your great love to your former minister ought not to be forgotten. Your perfect unanimity in your present case ought not to be slighted, and however it may please God to dispose of me, you have given me such a testimony of your esteem and regard, as I trust I shall ever with the utmost gratitude remember. But then, on the other hand, I am forced to consider that I am solemnly ordained over a people who have in general treated me with the greatest affection, and many of whom have been the seals since I came amongst

them—that they have for a long time before been unsettled and divided, but are now, through divine mercy, harmonious and united—that my labours have been, and are still, in a measure, blest unto them, above a hundred having been added since my first coming amongst them, and four having proposed this month, in short, that their hearts seem as much engaged to me as ever, and they will do what they can to make my stay comfortable; and if 'tis otherwise 'tis not for want of a will but of a power. To which I may add, that I very much ascribe my recovery from a late dangerous illness to their affectionate care and unwearied supplications. I say, when I consider these things, I am in a great strait. I cry to God for direction, but what way I shall take, I know not.

" My present determination seems to be entirely to refer myself to the church's disposal. I have therefore laid your letter before them. I opened your pressing importunities with the utmost sincerity, at the same time desiring them both publicly and privately to entreat guidance from him who hath power over all spirits, and can turn them as the rivers of water are turned. I have also pressed them to avoid all prejudice and passion, and after a month's time taken to consult God and one another, to return you such an answer as shall appear most equitable and consistent with their duty.

" When I reflect upon my past services, and how I have been amongst them, in weakness and fear, and much trembling, I not only wonder at that degree of acceptance I have met, but think that a change in their ministry might probably cause a happy alteration in their circumstances. But then, for the same reason, I tremble at the thought of accepting a call to succeed such a man, and in such a place, where I am conscious much prudence, great courage, and superior abilities of every kind, are required. However, I would in this affair have no will of my own. I would throw myself wholly upon providence, and begging an interest in your warmest addresses at the throne of grace, refer you to the church's answer, which you may expect to receive at the before-mentioned time.

" I remain, your affectionate
" Though unworthy brother in Gospel bonds,

" B. BEDDOME."

The Church took a month to consider the matter, sought the Lord both publicly and privately, and

then came to an unanimous determination (*nem. con.*) to send them a negative answer. This answer was ordered to be drawn up by the brethren, John Reynolds, John Reynolds, Jun., and Richard Boswell. When read, it was approved, signed, and sent. It reads as follows:—

“The Church of Christ at Bourton, to the Church lately under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. Samuel Wilson deceased.

“BELOVED IN THE LORD,

“We, having received your letter, cannot but sympathise with you on account of your great loss—a loss much to be deplored by every pious heart, and especially by you who have lost so valuable a pastor. We can assure you that we are greatly concerned at the death of the Rev. Mr. Wilson, and cannot but, with a concern for God's honour, his worship, &c., join with you in earnest prayers to the great Shepherd of Israel, that he would in his own due time supply the loss of so valuable a minister and pastor, though unknown to most of us. As to the representation you gave of the too general state of religion in London, we must condole with you; and, indeed, we find a like remissness in the country, which certainly affords a very dismal and gloomy prospect to every considerate mind.

“It is much, indeed, to be desired that there were more learned and popular ministers in London, and the more so by reason of what the Churches in the country receive from thence. And as for us, though through the goodness of Providence, we have been able to subsist as yet without being burdensome, yet we heartily join with those who have met with relief, in acknowledging the generosity and charity of our friends in London who have afforded it. And we hope that the Lord as he raised up your late pastor, and settled him with you, so he will now also raise you up another, for the honour of his name and your abundant satisfaction, without your being driven to such extremes as to deprive another Church of its pastor. And, although you are in your letter pressing for Mr. Beddome's removal hence to London, yet we apprehend the very arguments you make use of to enforce this (such as the Church's necessity, the fear of its dispersing, or perhaps of its total dissolution), would if impartially and duly considered, more strongly plead for his still abiding

with us. And the more so from the considerations following. Our great love and esteem for this our learned and faithful pastor would make the parting stroke very severe and unsupportable, so that, if there were no other reason than this —this would restrain us from giving our assent to his removal. But when we reflect upon our past situation, that there has been a professing people in this parish, and the parts adjacent, for 150 years, formerly called Puritans, and since Baptists and Independents, in which time there has been the loss of divers ministers and pastors, and many of us now remember the death of two or three which were very eminent and valuable men. When we also consider, that before our present settlement, we were destitute for many years, and notwithstanding our many cries to Almighty God, he was pleased to withhold direct answers to prayers till at length he graciously raised up, eminently qualified, and unexpectedly sent, our dearly beloved and Rev. pastor, Mr. Beddome, to become our pastor. When we add to this, that his endeavours have been wonderfully blest for the restoring decayed religion, the increasing our Church with members, and the raising up gifts for the help of other Churches, some of which are fixed as pastors. Nor can we help adding that God lately visited our pastor, and brought him down to the gates of the grave—hereby shewing us that this treasure was but in an earthen-vessel, when we, following our ancient course, cried unto God, and he graciously restored him again to health, and we hope to former usefulness, insomuch that several persons have lately proposed to the Church for communion, who were wrought upon under his ministry.

“ On these accounts, we say, and others too tedious to mention, we cannot but look upon him as an answer to our prayers, both when first given and when again restored after his illness. And answers of prayer are sweet and valuable mercies: and shall we act a part so ungrateful to a gracious and bountiful God, so injurious to ourselves, our families, and to others round about us, as to give up this valuable mercy? Has God answered our prayers, and shall we let go the answer? This, we apprehend, would be very provoking to God. On these accounts we cannot consent to his removal, but must, till we see occasion to alter our minds, absolutely refuse it. Yet, though we cannot comply with your request, we have both publicly and privately remembered your case, and shall still continue to meet you at the throne of grace, to beg that God, the great Shepherd of Israel, and Bishop of Souls, would qualify and send you a

minister and pastor after his own heart, to your abundant joy and satisfaction.

“We remain, your brethren in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel,

“JOHN REYNOLDS, SEN.,
“JOSEPH STRANGE,
“RICHARD BOSWELL,

} Deacons,

[And thirty-seven Male members.]

“Signed at our Church-meeting, December 16, 1750, in the behalf, and by the consent of the whole Church.”

Not content with this answer, the Church in London addressed a second letter to the Church at Bourton, of which the following is a copy:—

“BELOVED IN THE LORD,

“We are favoured with Mr. Beddome’s letter of the 22nd of November, in answer to ours of the 11th of that month, sent to him, wherein he is pleased to state several motives or reasons, as well for, as against the removal we solicit; and then, with a proper caution, adds, ‘when I consider these things I am in a great strait, I cry to God for direction, but what way I shall take I know not. My present determination seems to be entirely to refer myself to the church’s disposal.’

“We have also your letter of the 16th of December, in answer to ours of the 11th of November, sent to you, and therein we are favoured with your particular reasons or objections against Mr. Beddome’s leaving Bourton. And then you are pleased to say ‘on these accounts we cannot consent to his removal, but must, till we see occasion to alter our minds, absolutely refuse it.’ It is a maxim in the religious, as well as in the civil life, that the service of all is to be preferred to that of a part. No man ever said that the interest of one member is of equal importance with that of society in general.

“Having thus premised, we beg leave to assert that the great question in this case is, whether the prosperity of the churches in general of our faith and order, or that of the church at Bourton singly, is to be preferred. For in the present application, we have motives that extend much

farther than our own personal advantage. We are well persuaded that Mr. Beddome, if settled in London, would be ornamental and serviceable in the common cause of religion in a far greater degree than his present retired situation can possibly admit. And we propose this removal with earnest hopes of seeing Mr. Beddome a celebrated minister of the New Testament of Jesus; giving proper weight and significance to an interest too freely reproached by some among the Dissenters, as well as the National Church. And therefore the necessity of preserving an able and learned ministry here is apparent. In this view of the matter we hope you will see occasion to alter your minds, especially when it is considered (and we beg it may), that in all you have urged against Mr. Beddome's removal, the separate interest of Bourton and its neighbourhood is alone taken into the scale.

"We have put the merits of our case upon the head of mere necessity, and we still rest it there; because there is not (excuse the repetition) a minister besides Mr. Beddome fit and proper in all respects to supply the place, and repair the loss of Mr. Wilson, considered in his public character as an eminent servant of Christ, though unknown to most of you. And hereupon we say, Mr. Beddome's removal to London is necessary for the protection and advancement of the interest in general. Now, if the plea of necessity be made use of in favour of his continuance in the country, it can only respect the village of Bourton and its neighbourhood. If the argument of necessity was urged as between the church at Bourton and a single church in London, without regarding the general interest, even then Mr. Beddome's abilities would, as we apprehend, promise greater service here, than in a place of comparative obscurity. And the preference of the greater to the less, if applied to this case, carries with it a force and conviction not to be resisted.

"The general interest is strongly connected with the churches here, and the weight and influence of those churches will be more or less in proportion to their numbers, and the abilities of their ministers. If the people here, for want of a suitable ministry, are inclined to disperse, there are above forty other congregations in a very small compass ready to receive them. Now, is the case of Bourton the same with that of London in these respects? Who sees not the difference? You are pleased to acquaint us, that before your present settlement you were destitute for many years. But will it therefore be supposed, that a church in London can

survive the same difficulties? Whence arises your fear of a dispersion or dissolution, upon Mr. Beddome's removal? Have you not now amongst yourselves a gentleman (John Reynolds, Junior) of very promising abilities in the ministry? Are not the generality of our ministers more suited to a country than a city life? Is there, can there possibly be, the same necessity for a learned and popular ministry in a country town as in London? And we beg leave to say, that your objection, proceeding from the love and esteem you have for Mr. Beddome, respects not the general interest, and operates by way of constraint upon his usefulness here.

"The lot is in the lap, but the disposal is of God. We, who see as through a glass, darkly, pretend not to say that Mr. Beddome's removal to London will, at all events, answer the great design we have in view. It is sufficient for us if the probability is on our side. And we have the most convincing evidence that it is so, because his labours, as you very well know, have been wonderfully blest for the restoring of decayed religion, the increasing of the Church with members, and the raising up gifts for the help of other churches, some of which are already fixed as pastors. And the continuance in life of so eminent a servant of Christ is a blessing of great account in the common cause. We doubt not that you look upon Mr. Beddome as an answer of your prayers, both when first given and when again restored after his illness: and answers of prayer for Zion's prosperity are sweet and valuable mercies. But think not, sirs, that a minister, richly adorned with gifts and graces, and remarkably qualified for extensive service, is one of those mercies that you can keep or we can take. If Mr. Beddome, upon a strict and unbiassed view of the whole case, after mature deliberation and fervent prayer, shall be of opinion that it is his duty to accept the present call, he will then for himself determine in our favour, nor will the reluctance on your part eventually stand in his way.

"The freedom with which we have treated this subject is suitable to its importance. We have done our duty, and are presenting incessant prayers to the God of Israel for your prosperity and for that of all the churches, as well as for ourselves. We thank you for your kind expressions to us, and to the interest in general. We desire the continuance of your prayers, and those of your beloved pastor. And we beg the favour of his final

answer, with your sentiments upon the case as it now stands.

“ We are, beloved in the Lord, (with great affection) your brethren in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel.

“ Done, unanimously, in our Church Meeting, Feb. 3, 1750—1, and signed by us, by order of the whole church, and in their behalf.

“ THOS. MOSS,
 “ JOHN MANYPENNY.
 “ JOHN HATTERSLY,
 “ THOS. COLES.
 “ TIMOTHY EDWARDS, } Deacons.”

This second application called forth a reply from the Church at Bourton, drawn up by the same brethren as the former, and read, approved, and signed, on Lord's Day, Feb. 24th. At the same time the pastor read his answer to the said letter, for which being also in the negative, the church expressed their thankfulness. We give them both *in extenso*. The church's first, and then the pastor's.

“ BELOVED IN THE LORD,

“ We received your letter of the third of February, wherein you are pleased to renew your solicitations for Mr. Beddome's removal from hence to London, and to advance some things as motives or reasons, in order to give weight to your application. Your case is indeed distressing; but we are sorry you should desire, much more endeavour, to deprive another church of its fixed pastor, in order to repair the distressing loss of your worthy minister deceased. Is your distress great because you are not settled, and shall that be a reason why you should involve others in the same distress and sorrow you now feel, in order to extricate yourselves? Suppose another church, more numerous than yours, being bereaved of its minister, had made application for your late dear and Rev. pastor, Mr. Wilson, how kindly would you have received such proposal, or how would you have treated such a solicitation? You are pleased to say, that “ it is a maxim in the religious, as well as civil life, that the service of all is to be preferred before that of a part.” And you

proceed largely to apply this to the present case, and think that Mr. Beddome would be more extensively useful in London than in the country, with other things of the like nature. But, sirs, are not the abilities of ministers from God? And is it not from him, too, that their fruit is found? When they are useful, is it not God that makes them so? Has not Jesus his stars in his hand, and is it not from him they receive their brightness and lustre? And what if he appoint some to shine in dark corners of the world? Does not their light seem rather more to be needed there than where it has pleased him to fix a constellation? Indeed, you acknowledge that you don't pretend to say that Mr. Beddome's removal will at all events answer the great design you have in view, and that it is sufficient for you that the probability is on your side.

"But how will you prove that the probability is on your side? Will you do it from the wonderful success that has usually attended ministers that have left those that God has given to their charge? We are satisfied, we need not point out to you particular instances, these being many and apparent, wherein the contrary has been the case, notwithstanding there have been many and raised expectations. This, indeed, you now leave out, with good reason, though we had some distant hint of it in your former letter. The argument you bring to shew, that the probability of greater usefulness is on your side, seems to be drawn from Mr. Beddome's success at Bourton. And you are pleased to say that this is a most convincing evidence that it is so. But how does this appear? not, as has been hinted, from the success which usually attends such removals. Indeed, if ministers are brought to leave those places which God has appointed them, what foundation is there to expect that their usefulness should be continued? Usefulness consists not barely in preaching to a very great auditory, but in honouring religion by serving God and our generation in that post in which he sets us.

"We hope, we desire carefully to observe the directions, and submit to the disposals of Providence, but we cannot see that Providence directs to this; viz., that we should give up our beloved minister and pastor, whom God has graciously given us, as we trust in answer to our prayers, and whom he has made remarkably useful amongst us. And as God does, we hope, continue his usefulness, we cannot but think that it is his will that he should still continue amongst us. You are pleased to say that the general interest is strongly connected with the interest in London, &c. But whilst we

acknowledge with gratitude, the help our country friends receive from thence, we hope it will be also remembered, that if the churches in London rob those in the country of their ministers, they pull down with the one hand more, perhaps, than build up with the other. If the churches in the country must lose their ministers, whom God has fixed over them, and whom they dearly love, is not this the way to stir up animosities and divisions, which either may terminate in their dispersion, or reduce those to a state of dependence, who, as yet, are independent?

" You enquire whence arises our fear of a dispersion or a dissolution upon Mr. Beddome's removal, &c. But we beg leave to suggest that you might well ask yourselves whence your fear of the like arises. You cannot plead the want of supplies, because you have plenty and in general agreeable ones. And we have been credibly informed with sufficient evidence, that the dispersing of churches in London has been rather owing to a bad settlement than to the want of a minister.

" Upon the whole, not to be too tedious to you, we must declare, that we are so far from altering our minds with respect to Mr. Beddome's removal, that we must absolutely refuse it. Nor, upon a review of the whole case, can we think that this our refusal is inconsistent with a proper concern for the interest of religion in general, or that sincere love which we hope we bear towards you as a Church of Christ, and the desire we have of your happiness and welfare. We desire a continuance of an interest in your prayers at the throne of grace, and we hope we shall be enabled, with fervency and sincerity, to pray not only for the interest of Christ in general, but also that the God of Jacob, and the Shepherd of Israel, would settle a pastor over you to your joy and satisfaction.

" We are, Beloved in the Lord,

" Your affectionate Brethren in the faith and
fellowship of the Gospel,

" In behalf of the whole,

" JOHN REYNOLDS,
" JOSEPH STRANGE,
" RICHARD BOSWELL,
" JOHN REYNOLDS, JUNR.
" JOHN WOOD,
" JEREMIAH CRESSER,
" HENRY COLLET, and others."

"DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

"Herewith you receive our Church's answer to your last, and I can assure you that I neither influenced them in their consultations about it, nor had any hand in drawing it up. I rather acted as your advocate, in making the best of your arguments, and setting them in the clearest and strongest light I thought they would bear. The Church, then, having after mature deliberation and fervent prayer, thought fit again to return you a negative answer, I cannot but acquiesce in it, and that for the following reasons:—I cannot think that a minister firmly settled with a people, and rendered useful amongst them, can lawfully leave them without their consent, unless there be something on their side,—such as want of love, a wilful deficiency in their contributions, divisions, dissensions, or the like—to warrant such a removal. And herein I have the greatest writers on church government on my side; for though many have unwarrantably removed from their people, yet few, or none, have dared publicly to vindicate or defend such a practice. The judicious Dr Owen declares that such removals only are lawful, which are with the free consent of the churches concerned, and the advice of other churches or their elders with whom they walk in communion. And though he observes that in the early ages of Christianity, when some churches were increased in numbers, reputation, privileges, and wealth above others, it became an ordinary practice for the bishops to design and endeavour their own removal from a less unto a greater benefice; yet this was so severely interdicted in the Council of Nice, that they would not allow that a man might be a bishop or presbyter in any other place, but only in the church wherein he was originally ordained. And, therefore, decreed, that if any did so remove themselves, they should be sent home again, and there abide, or cease to be church officers.

"I have also had an opportunity, since my last, of consulting many of my friends in this part of the country, both ministers and others. And I have received letters from others at a remoter distance, and those persons of great judgment and distinguished piety, who, almost with one voice, declare it to be my duty to stay with my people, unless they will freely consent to my departure. To this I may add, that few such removals have really produced the advantages which have been expected. I shall only instance in the case of the Rev. Mr. Matthew Henry, whose memory is so precious in the churches of Christ. He left Chester

where God made him eminently useful, to serve the church at Hackney. The consequence was, that the church at Chester has been dwindling ever since, and Mr. Gardener's hearers are, if I am rightly informed, hardly so numerous as Mr. Henry's communicants were; and I never heard of any remarkable success that attended his ministry afterwards, though he continued very laborious therein to the last.

"If the prospect of greater usefulness is in itself a sufficient plea for the removal which you press, then it would be impossible for churches of a lower rank ever to be secure of the continuance of their pastors; nay, this principle would justify all the removals that ever had been made, or, perhaps, ever may be made, for this has always been professed to be the governing view, though, in some cases with what sincerity I will not take upon me to determine.

"To say no more under this head, I observe that the learned Dr. Gill, in his funeral sermon for your late excellent pastor, has entirely left out the prospect of greater usefulness, among the motives which he looks upon as sufficient to authorise the removal of a pastor from one place to another. With respect to Mr. Reynolds, whom you point out as a fit person to be my successor, he is certainly a very worthy man, and likely to be a very useful minister; and I know no person more fit to serve the people, were I to leave them; but he has been already called by two churches to take the pastoral care of them, and he declares that he would sooner settle with either of them than accept a call from Bourton. So that the church would be absolutely destitute, and might long continue so, were I to remove.

"Were I, therefore, in these circumstances to comply with your call, I greatly fear that such a compliance would neither be so comfortable to you nor me as at a distance you may apprehend. Certainly not to me, as I should act contrary to the dictates of my conscience, which, as I observed in my former letter, is either a very comfortable friend or a most dreadful enemy. I hope I have conducted the whole affair with some degree of uprightness and sincerity, and if my people would have consented to my removal (though I should have had much to sacrifice on account of the great affection I bear them) yet I should then have made no scruple of accepting your call. But, as they absolutely refuse it, the will of the Lord be done. I am determined that I will not violently rend myself from them, for I would rather honour God in a much lower station than that in which he hath

placed me, than intrude myself into a higher without his direction.

"I would just observe, that though your invitation hath proved abortive with respect to yourselves, yet it hath proved otherwise with respect to us; in that it hath more firmly united our people together, and stirred them up to pay off a debt of near a hundred pounds, under which they have long and heavily groaned, in which they have happily succeeded. And now, my dear and honoured friends, suffer me to remind you of the words of the evangelical prophet,— 'He that believeth will not make haste.' Do but wait God's time. Your interest is his. Your prayers are gone up before the throne. Let them be continued; and I do not doubt but the Great Head of the Church will provide for you much better than you have yet attempted to do for yourselves. Nor can I think that a small delay (should that be the case) will be so dangerous as you seem to apprehend. You are furnished with acceptable supplies, and the generality of mankind are fond of something new. But suppose the worst, that your auditory should be reduced, Nay, that the church itself should be considerably diminished, God hath once raised you up from a very low estate, and He hath power and goodness sufficient to do it again. 'Commit, then, your way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass.'

"These are my present thoughts of the matter, which I hope you will receive with your usual candour. And as I would not forget you in my warmest addresses at the throne of grace, so let me entreat your reciprocal remembrance of

"Your affectionate Friend and Brother in Gospel bonds,"

"B. BEDDOME."

Comparatively few ministers are ever called to pass through an ordeal as trying as the one disclosed in the above correspondence, and it may be safely affirmed, that none ever came out with more credit to themselves. By this circumstance, Mr. Beddome's uprightness, disinterestedness, and simplicity, are placed above suspicion. We are not surprised to hear that his people were provoked to love and good works. "Shame and confusion" would have *belonged* to them, had they failed to love him heartily.

They strove, however, with fresh zeal to promote his comfort. And first of all, they determined to get out of debt. This debt was contracted partly by the building of the minister's house in 1741, partly by the enlargement of the chapel in 1748, and partly by "strengthening" the chapel in 1750. To the latter Mr. Beddome refers in the following extract :—

"In 1750 an unfortunate circumstance happened, which increased the church's debt, for after we had repaired and enlarged the Meeting-house, the main beams of the galleries being poplar, and plastered in whilst they were too green, they rotted away as also many of the joice. So that there was a great danger of the galleries falling, nay, and of the roof too, which then bore upon the galleries. Upon this new beams and joice were provided, the galleries put a foot back, and their seats raised, and two upright pillars put to support the roof independently of the galleries. The charge of which was £25 6s. 8d."

But the church in Goodman's-fields had not quite forgotten Mr. Beddome. Nor did they regard their case as utterly hopeless. We give the subsequent facts in Mr. Beddome's own words as recorded in the Church-book.

"Dec, 15th. 1751.—Our pastor acquainted us that he had lately received a letter from some of the members of Mr. Wilson's church in London, giving him an account, that by reason of difference among the members of said church, about Messrs. Reynolds and Thomas, some being for one and some for the other; they were likely to be greatly distressed if not broken in pieces, and that both parties would unite in him if he could now consent to leave his people. That this being the only probable method of preventing a breach, they were forced again to have recourse to him. He also acquainted us that last Wednesday, upon desire, he gave Mr. Bull and Mr. Hattersly, the meeting at Burford, who renewed their solicitations, pressing his coming to London, not only from all the arguments before used, but from others taken from the present urgent necessity of their affairs. Our pastor, therefore, desired us to pray over and consider the

matter till Wednesday, the 25th instant, when he would call a Church-meeting, and receive our answer, by which at present he intended to be guided."

"Dec, 25th. Returned for answer to said pastor, that we could not see the state of the London church to be so distressed as represented, and that if it was, we could not consent to cast ourselves into the same or greater distress in order to help them."

CHAPTER IV.

Increase and Decrease—New Chapel—Statistical Summary—
Mr. Wilkins—Domestic Losses—Death of Mr. Beddome.
(1751—1795.)

WE have seen that when Mr. Beddome settled at Bourton, in 1743, the Church contained 100 members. In 1751 the number had risen to 180, as reported to the Association, meeting at Tewksbury in that year. The measure of prosperity vouchsafed to the church during the fourteen years following was very variable, as indicated by the letters to the Association. Three years elapsed during which not a single soul was added to the church, viz., 1752, 1753, and 1754. During this period fifteen were lost by death, and three by dismission, reducing their number to 162. Very trying to pastor and people was this period, but

“The Lord can clear the darkest skies,”

and with 1755 came the time of refreshing, twenty-two persons were added by baptism. Among these were Mrs. Beddome, Mrs. Patience Kimber, of Burford, Mr. Kyte, of the Upper Mill, Mrs. Mary Kyte, and Elizabeth Wood, of the Folly Farm. In 1759 the church consisted of 160 members, less by two than in 1753. The period of depression which had now set in, continued until 1764, when *twenty-eight* were added by baptism. Many had been lost by death, and the church now contained 183 members, just three more than in the year 1751, being a clear increase of three members in thirteen years.

During all this time, the congregations had been large and increasing. Seed-time and harvest are observable in the church as well as in the world. We must not condemn a man because he is not always reaping, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

In the year 1663 the church enlarged the burying-ground, by the purchase of a piece of land for the sum of five pounds, and to increase the available space within the chapel, they "*turned the gallery stairs without doors.*" Mr. John Collet gave the stones for walling in the new ground, and others gave the drawing. The cost of the whole, in money, was about thirty-eight pounds. Of this sum, William Snook, Esq., contributed ten pounds, and Mr. Beddome five pounds.

We have seen our fathers building a new chapel in 1701, erecting a house for their minister in 1741, "enlarging and repairing" the chapel in 1748, and strengthening the same in 1750. We must now notice a work which exceeds in magnitude either of the preceding. The following extract from the church-book, will set it clearly before us—

"Oct 10, 1764. We entered upon a subscription for enlarging and rebuilding our meeting house, in which Mr. Snook was the principal actor, and of which he was the most generous promoter. The old meeting-house, though altered and enlarged, was neither convenient nor sufficiently capacious, yet most were contented. However, through the indefatigable application of Mr. Snook, the new building was erected."

The dimensions of this new chapel were forty feet by thirty-five within the walls. The materials of the old chapel were made available as far as possible, or prudent, and exclusive of these, the cost of the new building was £473 14s. 10d.

Toward this sum, £69 were received as "Bene-factions from abroad." These were almost exclusively from London. Dr. Stennett procured and sent twenty guineas; George Baskerville, Esq., contributed ten guineas, and sent ten guineas more for a friend of his. Of the £404 raised by the church and congregation, Mr. Snook gave £128 7s., *i.e.*, £100, and the pulpit, sounding-board, &c., which cost £28 7s. Mr. Beddome contributed £30, and the rest was raised by smaller subscriptions, ranging from £20 to 5s.

It must not be overlooked, however, that much work was given, as well as money. And but for this the cost of the building would have appeared to be much greater. "Mr. Snook employed his team and servants almost continually. Mr. Boswell sent his team twenty-four days; Dr. Paxford twenty-four days; Mr. Truby five days; Thomas Cresser one day; John Strange six days; Mr. Radburn two days; Mr. Hurbert six days; Robert Taylor two days; Mr. Bosbery one day; William Wood two days; John Hurbert, labourer, gave a week's work, and John Phillips gave the same with self and horse."

The new chapel appears to have been opened in August, 1765. In that year the Association met at Bourton, and as the new chapel would not be ready at Whitsuntide it was agreed to defer the meeting to Wednesday, August 14th. In the letter to the Association on that occasion, the church says,

" 'Tis with pleasure we think of seeing your faces once more in the flesh, and though the unfinished state of our place of worship, and the difficulty of providing suitable accommodation for you in a country village, are some damps to our joy, yet, hoping that your great Lord and Master will make up in spiritual delights what is wanting in outward convenience, we bid you heartily welcome."

Wednesday, August 14th, 1765, became a red-letter-day in the memory of the "Saints and faithful brethren" at Bourton. And the interest attaching to it, spread far and wide. There were but fourteen churches in the Association, but there was twice that number of ministers present. There were the Rev. Messrs Tommerson, of Cheshire ; Sleep, of Risborough ; Wallin, of London ; Stanger, of Towcester ; Davis, of Fairford ; Thomas, of Henley-in-Arden ; Knight, of Warwick ; Turner, of Birmingham ; Ash, of Pershore ; Jones, of Upton ; George, of Wantage ; Darby, of Witney ; Overbury, of Tedbury ; Francis, of Horsley ; Ferriby, of Sodbury ; Macgowan, of Bridgenorth ; Butterworth, of Bengeworth ; Skinner, of Alecester ; Woodman, of Sutton ; Carpenter, of Middleton Cheney ; Hitchman, of Hilsley ; Davis, of Campden ; Caleb Evans, of Bristol ; Butterworth, of Bromsgrove ; Thomas, of Leominster ; Heydon, of Tewksbury ; Whitmore, of Hooknorton ; besides Beddome, Reynolds, and Strange, of Bourton. This was no mean gathering for a country village, in an age when railways were unknown. And there was a large congregation of hearers, as well as a great company of preachers. Good Mr. Beddome says, that in addition to vehicles of all other kinds, "there were eleven or twelve post-chaises at our Association," clearly indicating that some had come from places not very near to Bourton.

The period of thirty years, from 1765 to 1795, is not destitute of interest, but, unhappily, the interest of those years is mostly of the mournful kind. The state of things in the country was gloomy and depressing. The price of bread was frightfully high, the result of war and deficient harvests. The poor were familiar with privation and suffering, the bare recital of which makes both our ears to tingle.

The very cattle seem to have been visited with unusual disease. Year after year days were set apart for solemn prayer and fasting.

The fasting, indeed, was no new or novel thing to some who engaged in these services. Many such things were with them, and must have been still more, but for the alms given on these occasions. At Bourton chapel, there was invariably a collection for the poor on the solemn fast-day, and the proceeds were distributed principally in money, but some were supplied only with a shilling loaf. Auspicious day, that brought a shilling loaf at nightfall !

But there were "greater things than these," trials more fiery, sorrows more huge. "The ways of Zion mourned." Not that the congregation was "minished and brought low," but the church declined. Few, very few, were added during these years. During the period of thirty-one years, viz., from 1765 to 1795, both inclusive, there were sixteen years in which not a single soul was added to the church by baptism. It was so in the years 1765, 1766, 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, 1775, 1777, 1783, 1786, 1790, 1791, 1793, 1794, and 1795. It will be seen that there was one period of five years without a single baptism, viz., from 1768, to 1772.

The letters to the Association during this period were most mournful; year after year hope was expressed, until "hope deferred made the heart sick." In 1786 the Association met at Alcester, and Mr. Beddome, for the church, wrote as follows—

"BELOVED IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,

"Our harps still hang upon the willows, for though God once smiled on us, and we sensibly experienced his quickening and comforting presence, he now frowns, and we mournfully complain with the Prophet, 'Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.' In the years 1763 and 1764 we had thirty members added to our community, and thirteen

in the year 1766,* but since that we have been upon the decline. So that from 170 we are diminished to about 100 members, none being added, but two removed during the past year. We have once and again mentioned our flattering prospects; but the prisoners, though, we trust, prisoners of hope, don't manifest an inclination to go forth and shew themselves. Notwithstanding this, which is indeed matter of lamentation (and we hope you will sympathize with us, and spread our case before the Lord), yet we have reason to be thankful that our auditory keeps up surprisingly."

During the whole period of thirty-one years, fifty-three persons were added to the church by baptism, six were received by letter from other churches, 105 were removed by death, twelve were dismissed to other churches, and two were excluded for immorality.

The result was, that in the year 1795 the church consisted of 123 members: just sixty less than in the year 1764.

In the year 1777, when Mr. Beddome had attained his sixtieth year, it became necessary to procure for him some assistance in his ministerial labours; and the church, at his suggestion, obtained an assistant, or co-pastor, in the Rev. William Wilkins, of Cirencester. This gentleman had studied sometime in the Bristol Academy, and afterward completed his education in Scotland. He entered upon his stated services at Bourton, August 3, 1777, and from that time to Midsummer, 1792, the labours and emoluments of the pastorate were equally divided between him and Mr. Beddome. A plurality of ministers is not always the most conducive to the comfort of the parties most deeply interested. It is, therefore, pleasing to find that for the most part, the pastors in this case laboured together with cordiality and comfort. After Mr. Wilkins, an assistant was

* Reported to the Association in 1787.

found in Mr. Reed. During the period now under review, the church had been deprived of two valuable deacons—Mr. Boswell and Mr. Joseph Strange, and on the sixth of April, 1781, four other brethren were called to that office, viz: William Palmer, James Ashwin, Thomas Cresser, and Edward Reynolds.

If we turn from the church to the domestic circle, we shall find that in addition to that which came upon him daily, in the care of the church, Mr. Beddome was called to endure a great fight of afflictions in his family. In 1757 he was bereaved of his father, and thus lost “an excellent counsellor and a constant friend;” that, however, was an event not unlooked for. In 1765 he was severely tried by the death of his son, John, in his fifteenth year. This loss was, happily, greatly mitigated by the calmness and good hope that attended his early death. But the year 1778 opened with one of the severest afflictions he ever had to endure, in the loss of his son Benjamin, who died of a putrid fever, after a few day's illness, at Edinburgh, January 4th, of that year, in the twenty-fifth year of his age. He had been trained to the medical profession, and very early rose to eminence in his studies. He made himself master of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages, before he went from Bourton to London, and afterwards acquired a competent knowledge of the French and Italian. He was admitted a member of the Medical Society of Edinburgh before the usual time, and took his doctor's degree at Leyden, September 13th, 1777. It is said his inaugural thesis was much admired, as displaying great ingenuity and extensive research. It was on “The Varieties of the Human Species, and the Causes of them.” If high endowments, smiling prospects, and numerous and endeared connexions could protect from the shafts of death,

he had not died. On the very day his son died (though he had not heard even of his illness), Mr. Beddome preached from Psalm xxxi. 15, "My times are in thy hand;" and, as his custom was for many years to compose a hymn, and give it out to be sung after sermon, he composed for this service and gave out one singularly suited, not only to the sermon, but to his own situation, though he knew it not. This hymn has since become precious to many who never knew its history. We give it a place here for its intrinsic value, as well as its interesting associations.

" My times of sorrow and of joy,
 Great God, are in thy hand;
 My choicest comforts come from thee,
 And go at thy command.

" If thou should'st take them all away,
 Yet would I not repine;
 Before they were possessed by me
 They were entirely thine.

" Nor would I drop a murmuring word
 Though the whole world were gone,
 But seek enduring happiness
 In thee, and thee alone.

" What is the world with all its store ?
 Tis but a bitter sweet,
 When I attempt to pluck the rose,
 A pricking thorn I meet.

" Here perfect bliss can ne'er be found,
 The honey's mixed with gall;
 Midst changing scenes and dying friends
 Be thou my all in all."

After the mournful intelligence had arrived, Mr Beddome, recording these singular and painful events, says, "Alas, how much easier it is to preach than to practise! I will complain *to* God, but not *of* God. This is undoubtedly the most afflicting loss I have

ever sustained in my family. Heavenly Father! let me see the smiles of thy countenance, while I feel the smart of thy rod. 'Thou destroyest the hope of man.'

Six more years had run their round, and he was bereaved of his beloved wife. For thirty-four years she had been the sharer of his sorrow and his joy. Mrs. Beddome died, January 21st, 1784, of a fever, then prevalent in the village. She appears to have been a woman of eminent piety, and amiable disposition; while her patience under suffering excited the admiration of all. Generally beloved while living, her death was deeply lamented. Just completing his sixty-seventh year, this must have been a severe trial to the bereaved husband. But before the year had closed, "the clouds returned after the rain." His son, Foskett, fell into the Thames near Deptford, and was drowned, in the twenty-sixth year of his age. He also had been educated for the medical profession. We can readily imagine that he had, during a period of forty years, witnessed the departure of many of his earliest friends at Bourton. Among these none were missed more than the late William Snook, Esq. The very ground of his fixing upon Bourton as his dwelling-place, as he assured Mr. Beddome, was the very great regard he had for him as a friend and a minister. He appears to have been a liberal supporter of the cause of Christ, both at Bourton and in many other places.

In the year 1789 the Association met at Evesham. Mr. Beddome preached on that occasion, the seventeenth time in forty-six years. This was the last Association service in which he engaged; and the estimation in which he was held by his brethren, may be inferred from the fact, that he had preached before the Association as many times as the rules allowed.

In 1792 he visited his children and friends in London, where he preached with undiminished acceptance. Infirmities were increasing upon him, still his ministrations were lively and attractive. To preach the word was to him a labour of love. Possessing ample means, he did not continue in the office that he might "eat a piece of bread," but, always liberal, during the last six years of his life he expended all he received from his people on charitable purposes. It was his earnest desire that he might not be long laid aside from his beloved employ, and this was granted; for having for some time been carried to and from the chapel, where he preached sitting, he was confined to the house only one Lord's Day, and was composing a hymn for public worship only an hour before his death. Of this he had actually written the following lines:—

"God of my life, and of my choice,
Shall I no longer hear thy voice?
O let that source of joy divine
With rapture fill this heart of mine!"

"Thou openedst Jonah's prison doors,
Be pleased, O Lord, to open ours;
Then will we to the world proclaim
The various honours of thy name."

In the immediate prospect of this event, he was calm and resigned, in full assurance of hope. Among his last words were these—"Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"—"In my father's house are many mansions." Thus he fell asleep in Jesus, September 3rd, 1795, in the 79th year of his age,—fifty-five years from the commencement of his ministry at Bourton, and fifty-two years from the period of his ordination. A funeral sermon was preached by his old friend, the Rev. Benjamin Francis, of Horsley, from Philippians i. 21. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

CHAPTER V.

Review of Mr. Beddome's Ministry—Preacher, Poet, and Pastor.

“WE know not to give flattering titles to men,” but we are bound to say, that the individual whose life we have now traced to its close was no ordinary man. He was highly respected, and, on the whole, eminently useful. In the Midland Association his influence was great, and most usefully employed. He had the happiness of seeing several members of the church at Bourton enter the Christian ministry, and honourably discharge its onerous duties. The Rev. John Ryland, sen., A.M., was settled at Warwick (in 1750). The Rev. Richard Haines at Bradford, Wilts (1750). The Rev. John Reynolds, A.M., in Cripplegate, London (1766). The Rev. Nathaniel Rawlins at Trowbridge (1766). The Rev. Richard Strange at or near Stratton, Wilts (1752), and the Rev. Alexander Payne (place and date uncertain).

Although Mr. Beddome was an indefatigable writer he published but little—his Catechism, in 1752, which he employed at Bourton among adults as well as children, and which was recommended by the Association to other churches, in 1754, and the Circular Letter of 1765, were the only things he thus gave the world. Nevertheless, his fame had passed beyond the Atlantic. So that, in 1770, the *Senatus Academicus* of Providence College (now Hope University), Rhode Island, conferred on him

the title of A.M., as a token of their esteem for his talent and learning.

Since he departed this life he has become more widely known through the publication of several volumes of sermons published from his manuscripts. These have been very highly prized both by episcopal and nonconformist christians. One volume had reached the sixth edition in the year 1824, and another the fifth in 1831, while in 1835 a much larger volume was published, containing sixty-seven sermons. Admired for their evangelical sentiments and practical tendency, they are scarcely less pleasing in the simplicity and clearness of their style. And yet, we must not forget, that the author had not dreamed that they would be given to the public through the press. They were mere channels dug for his thoughts to flow in, skeletons to be clothed with flesh and receive the breath of life as spoken from the pulpit. In the pulpit he is said to have been emphatically at home. And in some sort he was always there, the pulpit was "in all his thoughts." The goal of one duty was the starting point of the next. We are told that he generally selected on the sabbath evening the topics for the discourses of the next.

We have before observed, that for many years he composed a hymn to be sung after each sermon. These, if collected, would fill several volumes. A selection was made from them, and published for the use of the Baptist denomination, in 1818. This volume contains 830 hymns, and is supplied with a valuable "Index of Scriptures," as well as a general index of subjects. These verses will be ever new,

" And sung by numbers yet unborn,
On many a coming sabbath morn;*"

* Ransford.

for our "New Selection" (as well as "Rippon's," and many others used by various denominations), is enriched by many a spiritual song having attached to it the name "Beddome." The hymn-book of which we have spoken was ushered into the world by a recommendatory preface by the late Rev. Robert Hall, in which he says—

"Far be it from me to indulge the presumptuous idea of adding to the merited reputation of Mr. Beddome by my feeble suffrage. But having had the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with that eminent man, and cherished a high esteem for his memory, I am induced to comply the more cheerfully with the wishes of the Editor, by prefixing a few words to the present publication. Mr. Beddome was on many accounts an extraordinary person. His mind was cast in an original mould. Favoured with the advantages of a learned education, he continued to the last to cultivate an acquaintance with the best writers of antiquity, to which he was indebted for the chaste, terse, and nervous diction which distinguished his compositions both in prose and verse. Though he spent the principal part of a long life in a village retirement, he was eminent for his colloquial powers, in which he displayed the urbanity of the gentleman, and the erudition of the scholar, combined with a more copious vein of Attic salt than any person it has been my lot to know.

"As a preacher, he was universally admired for the piety and unction of his sentiments, the felicity of his arrangement, and the purity, force, and simplicity of his language; all which were recommended by a delivery perfectly natural and graceful. As a religious poet, his excellence has long been known and acknowledged in dissenting congregations, in consequence of several admirable compositions, inserted in some popular compilations. This, however, is the first time the public have been presented with a volume of devotional poetry of his own production. The variety of the subjects treated of—the poetical beauty and elevation of some—the simple pathos of others, and the piety and justness of thought which pervade all the compositions in the succeeding volume, will, we trust, be deemed a valuable accession to the treasures of sacred poetry, equally adapted to the closet and to the sanctuary."

As a pastor Mr. Beddome seems to have been no less excellent than as a preacher. He evidently felt that

“Tis not a cause of small import,
The pastor's care demands.”

In this capacity he evinced great assiduity, tender care, and faithful affection. And the church upheld him in the exercise of a scriptural discipline. Very instructive are the records touching this matter. Fifty years would witness many and various scenes and circumstances to wound the pastor's heart. But discipline was exercised with a beautiful combination of gentleness and firmness. Take the following specimen of *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re.*

“March 8, 1761.—Took notice of the conduct of our sister Hetty Reynolds, who has absented herself from the house of God for several months, and agreed to let her know, that unless she gave satisfactory reasons for her conduct this day month, we shall proceed against her as directed by the divine word.”

Accordingly, Mr. Beddome sent her the following letter—

“March 8, 1761.—Sister Reynolds—The Church over which I am pastor, have this day come to a resolution, that if you do not appear before them this day month, to give an account of your irregular conduct in absenting yourself for so many months from the house and table of the Lord, they shall then take your ease into consideration, and proceed as they shall think most for the honour of religion. That you may be convinced of your sin in the neglect of God's worship, and breaches of his Sabbath, is the desire, and shall be the prayer of

“Your grieved pastor,

“BENJAMIN BEDDOME.”

“April 4, 1761.—Sister Hetty Reynolds appeared and behaved with a great deal of confidence, and without the

least appearance of remorse or sorrow. She pretended to have been offended and injured by some of the Church, and said that she had already, in part, and should conform to the Establishment. After talking very solemnly to her, with which she seemed not at all affected, she was desired to withdraw, and upon her return was told, that having wilfully absented herself for months together, from God's Word and ordinances, and discovering no repentance, but purposing to persist in the same course, she had, in effect, cut herself off from the society, and, therefore we no longer looked upon her as a member thereof—though we should continue to pray for, and whenever the Lord should graciously open her heart, and effectually convince her of her error, there was a door into the Church as well as out of it. Then Mr. Beddome prayed for her, but neither one thing nor another seemed to impress her mind."

Take another instance, with a somewhat better issue.

"Feb. 3. 1751.—Brother John Adams, having absented himself from the Lord's-table, and also from public worship, for sometime past. It being also publicly known, that he had frequented ale-houses—mis-spent his time, and acted very imprudently in courting a young girl—the affair was brought before the Church, when our minister certified that he had sent to the said John Adams, and by other methods endeavoured to come to the speech of him, but in vain. It was, therefore, ordered that our brother Richard Edgerton do in the name of the Church accuse him of idleness, tippling, sabbath-breaking, and great imprudence in the management of his secular concerns; and tell him that next Lord's-day we shall proceed definitively against him, when his presence is required."

"Feb. 10, 1751.—John Adams appeared, and the charges against him were renewed, to which he answered, that as for idleness, it was a thing that he abhorred, and had never before been accused of, but that he had been unable to work by reason of a rheumatic pain in his arms. As for tippling, he said that while unable to work, he had frequented the public-houses more than formerly, but had sometimes had nothing there but a *pint of small beer*. With respect to Sabbath-breaking, he endeavoured to excuse his absence from public worship by alleging illness, a visit to see his friends round about Chedworth, &c. But it appearing that he was not at

Chedworth meeting, when in that country, and that one Lord's-day, when he went up to Stowe, seemingly to attend the service there, he spent the time in an ale-house, instead of at the meeting ; as also that he absented himself from Bourton-meeting another Sabbath, of which he could give little or no account, the Church apprehended his excuses to be insufficient. With respect to his imprudent courtship, he said he humbly apprehended, it was not a matter cognizable by the church. He being desired to retire, the Church considered his case.

"As to the first charge, they apprehended his excuse might be sufficient, as to the second they were doubtful, as to the third and fourth, they were of opinion that he deserved censure; but as he behaved modestly and submissively before the Church, and confessed with seeming concern, that it had not been with him of late "as in months past," and that he hoped and wished for a revival—the Church unanimously agreed not immediately to exclude him, but to desire him to withdraw from special ordinances till they can be satisfied to re-admit him to the re-enjoyment of them."

Whatever else may appear in these cases, they clearly shew us that the church looked with tender concern upon the honour of religion, and would not suffer open sin to rest on any member unreproved. They felt that they were a jury who *should* "well and truly try, and true deliverance make between" their sovereign Lord and Lawgiver and their fallen friends. And they did it, and so doing maintained the honour of the Saviour's name, and strengthened their pastor's hands. Many instances might be given of the happy issue, but we forbear.

We must not, however, suppose that Mr. Beddome was surrounded by none but sympathizing friends in the church and congregation. There were those who dared to oppose and openly withstand him. Before we pass from the period of his ministry, we must give one other "picture"—not of any common occurrence, but of a scene which has no parallel in the history of this church, and we fancy, not in that of many others, at least in modern times.

"Feb. 25th, 1764.—At the desire of one or two friends Mr. Beddome preached from Rev. i. 10. "I was in the spirit on the Lord's-day" He meddled with the change of the Sabbath as little as he could to do justice to his text. He did not assert that the Christian Sabbath was intended, but only said that it was generally supposed to be so, assigning some reasons for it. When he had done, before singing, Jonathan Hitchman, of Notgrove, stood up in the face of the whole congregation and opposed him. He asked several questions, and made some objections, to which Mr. Beddome answered; but finding there was no likelihood of being an end, he at length told him that his conduct was both indecent and illegal—and that it was no wonder that he, who had so little regard to the Lord himself, as to deny his divinity, and set aside his righteousness, should have as little regard to his day. He replied, he knew no other righteousness of Christ than obedience to his gospel—to which Mr. Beddome answered, that Christ's righteousness was not our obedience to the gospel, but his own obedience to the law. And so the dispute ended."

Great excitement must have been occasioned by this incident. Strange tales would no doubt be told of the *scene* at the chapel. Had we looked in on that day we might have seen "the village in an uproar." Now all have passed away, let us hope that Jonathan Hitchman did not retain his mistaken views of the righteousness of Christ. Some years after, Mr. Beddome recording the death of Mrs. Hitchman says—"She was a good woman, a savoury Christian, and not at all tainted with her husband's views."

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Reed—Mr. Uppadine—Separation of Naunton—Mr. Coles invited—His Ordination. (1796—1801.)

WE now approach a period which brought to the Church at Bourton great discomfort, not to say, disaster. The shepherd was gone, and the sheep, if not scattered, were divided.

Mr. Wilkins's connection with the church terminated at Midsummer, 1792. This was his own act, of which he gave the church notice in December, 1791. "My reasons," said he, "no one needs to ask who reflects, nor shall I give them any farther; 'tis not without reluctance I have come to this decision." We will not, therefore, enquire into the causes of uneasiness, for if we did, we should get no answer. Subsequently to this, Mr. Reed became assistant to Mr. Beddome. His services were continued some time after Mr. Beddome's decease.

When "there was no king in Israel," "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Something of this kind occurred at Bourton; the misfortune being, that what appeared right in a man's "own eyes," was wrong in the eyes of his neighbour. The end of which was that "envying and strife" crept in, and where these are, "there is confusion and every evil work." Very unhappy were the meetings of the church; hard sayings were thrown about recklessly; brethren sometimes retired struck by a hard speech; meetings of a private character were necessary in the morning, to heal the wounds inflicted yesternight.

After Mr. Reed, the Rev. Mr. Uppadine visited Bourton, and supplied the church for a time. He came first in the summer of 1796, and in March, 1797, consented to become their pastor. Still there was no settled peace. The church was "like the troubled sea." Some had all along retained their attachment to Mr. Wilkins, and in 1799, it was proposed by some of his friends, that he and Mr. Uppadine should be their joint-pastors, including in their charge Bourton, Naunton, and Stowe. Naunton and Stowe were consulted, when the friends at the former place made answer, that Mr. Rodway having been their minister for two years, they thought it right to continue him, and not "to turn him off without any dislike, which," say they, "we should if we were to choose any other minister. As we have been comfortable, we wish to keep so." They had formerly requested that the ordinance might sometimes be administered at Naunton, and that by Mr. Wilkins, both these requests had been, as they said, disannulled, and they had therefore secured the services of Mr. Rodway. This project of a co-pastorate therefore failed. While acting in a separate capacity, the friends at Naunton had not been formally constituted a separate church. The following letter was therefore sent to them by the church at Bourton.

"January 2, 1801.

"DEAR BRETHREN,

"As you have after prayer and consideration, withdrawn yourselves from this church, so as not to interfere with the concerns thereof, having chosen Mr. Rodway your minister and pastor, We, the members, now met together by appointment, think it our duty to send this message, not in anger, but in prudence, to let you know we no longer look on you as members with us, but to esteem you as brethren and sisters in the Lord, wishing you peace, love, and prosperity, and desiring your prayers for us."

Meanwhile, Mr. Uppadine's position appears to have been not the happiest. The issue was, that he, recommended by the late Rev. Abraham Booth, removed to Hammersmith.

Many eyes had been turned ere this to the Rev. Thomas Coles, assistant to Mr. Booth, and now more distinct and frequent mention is made of him, as likely to heal their breaches, and become a very useful pastor. Mr. Wilkins (still resident at Bourton) advised the deacons to secure his services; and to place the matter beyond doubt, as well as to clear the path for Mr. Coles, gave to the church the following note—

“To the church at Bourton,

“I do most sincerely and earnestly recommend to you to take every step to obtain Mr. Thomas Coles to be your minister and pastor; as I have in common with most, if not all of you, a very high opinion of him and think one pastor the only likely way for you to be comfortably settled.

“W. WILKINS.

“Bury Fields, February 16, 1801.”

Mr. Coles had evinced considerable disinclination to leave London, and in letters to his friends had very much discouraged any application being made to him to that end. On the 28th of June following, however, it was determined by the assembled church to invite Mr. Coles to become their sole pastor and minister. This was most cordially approved also by the subscribers, and *wellwishers*, all whose names were attached to the document. The first name on the list is that of James Ashwin, who died on the third of September following. His death is thus recorded by a brother deacon—

“September 3, 1801, departed this life, an honoured and beloved brother in the Lord, James Ashwin, aged ninety-one. An honourable member and deacon of this church, of

a savoury spirit in the things of God, a humble Christian, often afflicted, and greatly comforted in his affliction. A constant attendant on the means of grace, when able, and an admirer of the grace of the means, saying, 'why me, such a sinner as I have been, to have hope toward God my Redeemer?' He cherished an ardent desire for the good of souls, and for the peace and prosperity of Zion. He was calm and composed in his last affliction, though in great pain. Though not destined to enjoy the ministry of Mr. Coles, he felt much interest in the prospect of his coming, and requested that he would preach at his funeral, from Jeremiah xxxi. 3, which was done on the eighth of that month."

At the present time, after the lapse of sixty years, there are two persons living among us whose names were attached to the invitation, but the rest "are fallen asleep." The following is the letter of invitation addressed to Mr. Coles.

"The Church of Christ of the Baptist denomination, at Bourton-on-the-Water, with the subscribers and usual attendants upon divine worship with them, to Mr. Thomas Coles, the assistant minister of the church at Goodman's Fields, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Abraham Booth.

"DEAR FRIEND AND BROTHER,

"The restoration of peace and harmony, and the return of prosperity, to a society long harassed with distraction, is the object of our warmest wishes, and we have such confidence in your attachment to this church of Christ, that we do not doubt your sympathy or your solicitude on our behalf. Past unhappy circumstances you know, and we shall not trouble you with the painful repetition, as we sincerely wish never to recall them more, but for the purpose of humbling ourselves before God on their account. After numerous and unavailing efforts, we are more than ever united in our judgments and inclinations to obtain (if the Great Shepherd of Israel shall condescend to answer our prayers) a pastor after God's own heart, under whose ministrations we may recover that reciprocal affection, and that respectability as a church, the loss of which we have

long deplored. To heal our breaches, and to restore unto us peace and harmony, is one important benefit which we hope may be obtained under a pastor whom we love and respect. To administer instruction, admonition, and comfort, as the varied circumstances of the christian life may require, is one peculiar advantage of a settled ministry. To preserve order and discipline, to maintain with regularity a solemn and habitual attention upon divine ordinances, we are fully convinced a settled pastor to be necessary. To watch over and to cherish the first appearances of piety in our young people and others is the important province of the man whom God will incline to accept the solemn charge. Some of our fellow-worshippers have long desired to join themselves to the Lord, and to us, according to his will, and the admission of such to the fellowship of the church here, will be an encouraging introduction to the pastoral work. We do then, Dear Sir, in the fear of God invite you, and request you to fill up this high and interesting office in this church, and to become our sole pastor and minister. And we devoutly pray the great proprietor of the church may incline you to accept this our invitation. You possess already our esteem and our affection, and these will be greatly promoted by devoting your talents, and zeal to our best interests, and to the revival and extension of religion in this place. This is the place of your nativity: it is the place where first the heavenly light dawned upon your mind; here your 'best friends, your kindred dwell.' We are persuaded you feel the power of such attractions, and hope they will contribute to a decision favourable to our wishes. We are ready to exert ourselves for the security and advancement of your comfort, and shall think ourselves bound by gratitude as well as brotherly love, to render your situation easy and happy. The causes of our past uneasiness and disappointments we hope are declining, and we cannot but indulge the pleasing expectation, that by the exercise of a gracious principle, and by the influence of a steady christian temper and conduct, all occasion of disaffection may subside, and the mountain become a plain.

"We transmit herewith an address to the church among whom you now labour. We have long and earnestly sought to be directed in the right way. We have sought the Lord, and are willing to hope that the measure we have now adopted is agreeable to his will, and best calculated for reviving and perpetuating the work of the Lord in this place. You will, we know, seek the direction of unerring wisdom, and that

your ultimate decision may be the acceptance of our invitation, is our united desire and request.

“ We are, Dear Sir, your affectionate
“ Friends and brethren in the Lord and his gospel,
“ Signed, &c.”

The following is the companion letter addressed to the church in London.

“ The church of Christ of the Baptist denomination at Bourton-on-the-Water, to the church of Christ of the same faith and order under the pastoral care of the Rev. Abraham Booth, meeting in Goodman’s Fields, London —sendeth christian salutation,

“ RESPECTED AND BELOVED BRETHREN,

“ For a long series of years we were favoured by the great Head of the church with the ministrations of our beloved pastor, the late Rev. Benjamin Beddome. Since his removal to the immediate presence of his divine Master, we have experienced much disappointment in our efforts to obtain a successor, and have been like sheep without a shepherd. We deeply deplore the unhappy consequences, the disunion and distraction which have interrupted our peace and spiritual prosperity; we dread the consequences should divisions continue, and of that indifference and disaffection which are produced thereby, and sincerely long and pray for the return of harmony, mutual love, and the revival of religion among us.

“ Under these impressions, our desires and expectations are directed to our much-esteemed friend and brother, Mr. Thomas Coles, now labouring among you, as an assistant to your worthy pastor. For some years past our hopes have been fixed upon him; he is a native of this place; here he was first awakened to a knowledge of himself and of the way of salvation, which he has devoted his life to extend and promote. His connections reside here; and we do not doubt but he feels the attachments connected with such circumstances. He is known to and beloved by us all; and we consider him to be the person, under Providence, most likely to re-unite us, to consolidate our affectionate intercourse, and to advance the kingdom of Christ in this place.

“ We sincerely regret that any circumstance has occurred

to obstruct the success of our endeavours to obtain him as our minister, and hope no similar circumstance will ever occur again. We have, with the concurrence of all the members, subscribers, and usual attendants with us, at a church-meeting held for that purpose, and the general approbation of those who were not then present, sent an invitation to Mr. Coles, requesting him to become our sole pastor and minister in the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and addressing you, beloved brethren, we respectfully solicit your acquiescence in, and consent to the invitation so given. We have the fullest confidence in your esteem for him who is the object of our wishes, and request your kind concurrence, as a proof of that generosity which a gracious principle inspires and cherishes. Permit us to entreat you to commiserate our distressing circumstances, and in compliance with our warm desires, to admit our proposal and to gratify our hopes, by suspending your claim and allowing our invitation its free and full effect, upon our mutual friend and brother, Mr. Thomas Coles. Our situation is peculiar; we know not on whom beside we could fix our attention with the least prospect of success, and beg, therefore, an interest in your prayers, and a peculiar proof of your christian liberality and love, in concurring with our efforts to obtain as our sole pastor and minister, the man of our choice.

“We are, with great esteem and affection,
“Your sincere friends and brethren in Christ.

“Signed in behalf of the whole,

“WILLIAM PALMER,
“EDWARD REYNOLDS,
“THOMAS CRESSER.”

In answer to this, the church at Bourton received the following letter from the church in London.

“BRETHREN, AND CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

“Your letter respecting Mr. Thomas Coles, being laid before us and duly considered, the result was as follows:—
‘Moved and resolved, That the public ministry and the private conduct of Mr. Thomas Coles, during the time he has been with us, have endeared him to the pastor and members of this church; and led us to look forward with pleasure to a more intimate and permanent connexion, if,

Providence shauld spare his life.' ' Moved and resolved, That as we entertain a christian sympathy with the church at Bourton under the peculiarly afflictive circumstances which have attended it, and in various respects yet continue ; we will not urge Mr. Coles's connection with us as a bar to his removal—provided he himself be satisfied that the leadings of Providence direct him to another sphere. The concern, however, that we should feel at such an event, could be compensated by nothing short of a well-grounded persuasion, that the interests of our divine Master would be more essentially promoted by it, and that, while we act under the influence of this persuasion, we are encouraged to hope that the great Head of the church will direct us to such supplies as the circumstances of our aged and esteemed pastor may require, and may tend to promote the prosperity of his cause among us.'

" Such, Christian brethren, were the resolutions of the Church relative to the important affair about which you addressed us. Resolutions which, we doubt not, you will consider as expressing an equally cordial regard to the character of Mr. Thomas Coles, and to your happiness. Sincerely praying, that the spirit of wisdom and of grace would effectually guide both him and you in the momentous concern, we, on the behalf of the church, subscribe ourselves,

" Your cordial friends and brethren in the Lord,

" ABRAHAM BOOTH, Pastor.

" SAMUEL ETHERIDGE,
" WILLIAM TAYLOR,
" THOMAS KEY,
" JOHN WILLIS,
} Deacons.

" Given at a special church meeting, August 16th, 1801."

It is impossible to forget how fifty years before, the Church in London, being greatly distressed, and fearing lsst they should be "broken to pieces," had applied to that at Bourton, entreating them to leave Mr. Beddome to choose his own course, and how they absolutely refused to "loose him, and let him go." Now the case is reversed, and without insinuating, or even thinking that they were wrong then, we must admit that the conduct of the Church in

London in the present instance does them the greatest credit—reflects upon them the highest honour. Their conduct was disinterested and noble.

On the 13th of September, 1801, Mr. Coles was at Bourton, and made the following announcement to the Church there :—

“ I particularly request all such as have the honourable and happy issue of the affairs of this Church at heart, to stop at this time, that they may hear my sentiments upon the subject before us.”

The letter from London was then read, after which Mr. Coles addressed the Church in manner following :—

“ You have heard, my friends, the letter from the Church among whom I have been in London. I doubt not, but you consider it as discovering respect and affection for you as a Church and a people, and for myself as an individual. My connection with them was mutually agreeable, and entered upon with the full prospect on both sides of its being more intimate, and also permanent.

The peculiarly distressing situation in which you have been, and still are, having been represented by you to the Church in London, excited their sympathy, and from a disinterested view, to the benefit of the cause of Christ in general, they determined to suspend their claim, and to leave me at liberty to ascertain what was the will of God, and the path of duty, and to act accordingly—whether to abide with them, or to remove to Bourton. It is but reasonable that both they and myself should have every degree of satisfaction possible as to the ground on which I come among you, should I be disposed so to do. I have therefore wished to meet you personally upon this subject, that in order to have everything done in the most open, honourable, and satisfactory manner, I may know whether your sentiments and wishes at the present time coincide with those expressed in the invitation, signed and sent to me more than two months ago.

Suffer me, then, to ask you, as in the presence of God, four questions, which you are requested to answer. After they are read over, I shall give you sufficient time to signify your approbation or disapprobation.

First, do you consider all former engagements, whatsoever, with other ministers, as no longer in any shape binding upon you ?

Second, do you think one pastor and minister the most likely method in order to obtain, with the blessing of God, restoration and revival ?

Third, do you still desire me, in compliance with the invitation I received from you, to become your sole pastor and minister ?

Fourth, do you leave the subject of occasional exchange between me and a neighbouring minister entirely to ourselves ?

The questions were then repeated, and put singly to the meeting, and without exception each individual answered each question in the affirmative, by holding up the hand. After which Mr. Coles said :—

“ Had not these questions been answered as they have, I could not have acted either consistently or conscientiously without putting a negative on your request, for I could not otherwise have seen a prospect of comfort for myself, or of usefulness among you. But as you appear cordially and universally to approve of the things I have stated, I shall lay open the whole business before Mr. Booth, and my best friends in London, and return you an answer, with my final decision, as soon as possible.”

At the same meeting the following letter was adopted by the Church :—

“ The Church of Christ at Bourton-on-the-Water, to the Church of Christ of the same faith and order, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Abraham Booth, meeting in Goodman’s Fields, London, send their grateful acknowledgments to the said pastor, and members of the Church, for their compliance with our wishes with respect to Mr. Coles, for the disinterested and Christian spirit with which they have regarded the cause of Christ in this place, in leaving Mr. Coles to his own liberty, under the guidance of Divine Providence. At the same time, with Christian sympathy both with your honoured pastor and yourselves, in giving up so valuable an acquisition as Mr. Coles, should he consent to come to us, we heartily wish and earnestly pray that you may

be supplied with another assistant every way to your own satisfaction. In behalf of the Church, we subscribe ourselves, your very affectionate brethren and friends in the Lord,

“ WILLIAM PALMER,
“ THOMAS CRESSER,
“ EDWARD REYNOLDS.

“ Bourton, September 13, 1801.”

Mr. Palmer says : “ It was a good day—a day of peace and joy. May the good Lord continue so great a blessing.” For a time the Church stood in doubt, but on the 4th of October, their doubts were dissipated by the following letter, read to the Church :—

“ To the Church of Christ of the Baptist denomination, meeting at Bourton-on-the-Water, and late under the pastoral care of the Rev. Benjamin Beddome.

“ DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,

“ Upon the reception of your invitation to become your sole pastor, in which you were joined by subscribers and others, usual attendants upon Divine worship, my feelings not only surpassed in strength, but differed in kind, from what they had been on former occasions. Previous to that time I felt much for you, and my soul mourned in secret places, at every recollection of you; but an irresistible impulse from a consciousness of duty compelled me to discourage the repeated notices you gave me of your intentions or wishes relative to myself. And more mature reflection justifies my determination, and tells me I did right. Without the most distant prospect or apprehension that the forbidding aspect might change, I cheerfully accepted an invitation from the church in Goodman’s Fields, where I had been for some months before, and entered upon a connection which promised increasing and permanent happiness and usefulness. It is unnecessary to enumerate a variety of circumstances which operated so as to change the scene. With them we are all well acquainted, and they have, doubtless, their proper place in accomplishing the wise and gracious designs of Providence. Suffice it to say, I could not longer persist in an immediate

and decided negative; though, agreeably situated as I was in London, there were many considerations that would have urged me to it. I saw it, however, my duty to hear you, to reflect, to consult, to commit it to the Lord, and to wait with patience the intimations of his providence.

"In connection with your invitation to me, you saw the necessity of addressing a letter to the Church in London, who, under the influence of a disinterested and noble spirit, acceded to your request, and from an affecting view of your deplorable condition, left me at liberty to do as duty might dictate—either to remain or remove. It was then thought wise and necessary I should visit you, to investigate some circumstances, and thus aid my mind in coming to a decision. I have done this; I have stated my own views; I have learnt yours—they coincide—we are agreed.

"This with many had been more than once recognized in private, and with a greater number still was solemnly ratified in public. These, among other things, make me alive to hope, and cheerful under its influence. But I should do wrong if I said my fears were all allayed. No, they *will* at times cast a gloom over the brightened scene. They *will* suggest the difference between an object beheld in prospect and hoped for, and hope realized, and the object in possession. And thus, they fill my mind with awful images, renewed distractions—unchristian tempers and conduct—instability—a temporary calm, while the disordered elements are rallying and combining their forces to produce a storm more furious and destructive than any former one. But, on the other hand, Brethren, methinks that your persevering regard in your future conduct to your past professions and resolutions, will prove that in no situation ought we to sit down in despair, but still against hope to believe in hope. Glorious restoration! Should the Lord return to you days and seasons bearing some resemblance to former ones; when a burning and shining light shone in your temple, and in the enjoyment of his light you were comforted, edified, and multiplied. Then the enemies which have met you with reproach, or passed you with a sneer, shall retire in silence and respect. The churches which have lamented your fall shall rejoice as you rise again; the heavenly hosts themselves shall not be unaffected spectators; but, above all, the Lord himself, who hath withdrawn from you, shall return and fill His house and your hearts with His glory.

"But, my dear friends, it is high time I should intimate

to you that the period of anxious suspense is closed. I have decided, and decided in your favour. Nor would I delay when once my mind was fixed, the communication of it to you. But, O my soul, who among the veteran leaders in Immanuel's army does not feel his insufficiency—does not pause and tremble at so vast a charge as the care of souls?

How then, ought a youth to feel? What trembling anxieties must agitate his breast! And, my frinds, I should be justly chargeable with rash presumption; I should not only waive the acceptance of so arduous a post, but retire from the ranks altogether, were it not for the gracious assurances of a faithful God, who attends his servants as they proceed, and will not desert them till they have fought a good fight, and finished their course with joy. Brethren, pray for me—grant this request, and I am happy—deny it, and whatever I sought and obtained among you, I should be miserable and useless.

“Without your fervent, frequent, unceasing prayers, you might expect that if your minister will not fall to the dis-honour of Christ and his cause, or become unstable, wavering, and lukewarm,—that he would labour in vain among you and spend his strength for nought; and though approved of God for his fidelity, not be a blessing to you by his success. I am pained when I behold that part of God's vineyard I am leaving, and that aged, faithful, and honoured labourer stationed there; and nothing but a conviction of duty would have induced me to have acted upon their generous resolution, and broken the agreeable and profitable connection that has subsisted between us, by complying with your request. They have a claim not only upon your gratitude, but upon your prayers, that the Lord would sanctify the dispensation to them as well as yourselves and to me, and perpetually supply and prosper them.

“My dear friends, I would not weary you; if this letter be too long already, the importance of the subject must be my apology. ‘I am sure,’ says the Apostle, ‘that when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.’ Would to God I could join him with a confidence as steady and animating. Let me, however, adopt his words as he proceeds—‘I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may come unto you with joy, by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.’ ‘Now, the Lord of peace

himself give you peace always, by all means. The Lord be with you all. Amen.'

"I am, your affectionate, though unworthy
"Brother, in the bonds of the Gospel,

"Thos. COLES."

"The above," says the record, "was a welcome message to the Church, and received with great joy, in hope, that with the blessing of God the great end may be answered ; and what is worthy of remark, this day we have the joyful tidings of peace made between this nation and France. We endeavoured to praise and give thanks to God for a double blessing—the man of our choice, and plenty of bread after scarcity." As a first expression of their gladness and readiness to redeem their pledges—"A shadow of good things to come"—the Church resolved to repair the parsonage, and to put it into a thoroughly good, clean condition. They could not suffer a clean man to go into a dirty house, or sit down amidst dilapidations.

The next thing, was to arrange for the ordination of Mr. Coles. This was fixed for the 17th of November. On that occasion Mr. Mann, of Moreton-in-Marsh, read the scriptures and offered prayer ; Mr. Butterworth, of Evesham, delivered the introductory discourse, and offered the ordination prayer. Mr. Smith, of Blockley, proposed the usual questions to Mr. Coles, who in reply made a most interesting statement of his religious experience, and a noble confession of his faith. Dr. Ryland delivered the charge to the pastor, founded upon three several passages, woven into one text, viz. :—"To the one we are the savour of death unto death ; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things ?" 2 Cor. ii, 16. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything

as of ourselves." 2 Cor. iii, 5. "And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2 Cor. xii, 9. Mr. Hinton, of Oxford, preached to the people. Mr. Smith, of Shipston, offered the concluding prayer, and in the evening, Mr. Page, of Bristol, preached.

"A day of joy and gladness—a numerous and serious auditory."

CHAPTER VII.

Early life of Mr. Coles—Oxfordshire Baptist Association—
Increase of the Church—William Palmer—Statistical
Summary—Death of Mr. Wilkins. (1801—1812.)

DOES anyone ask, who was “Mr. Thomas Coles?” What were his antecedents? And how came the Church at Bourton to form so high an estimate of his character, and to regard him as “the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in?” The answer has been already supplied in part, but admits of fuller statement.

The Rev. Thomas Coles was the youngest son of William and Mary Coles, both pious persons. He was born at Rowell, in the parish of Hawling, near Winchcombe, Gloucestershire, August 31, 1779. Deprived of his father in his first year, his widowed mother, with her family, removed to Bourton-on-the-Water in the year 1783. His very early years were marked by mental progress, and afforded pleasing indications of true religion. So soon as 1790, when only in his eleventh year, he began to take somewhat extended notes of the sermons preached by the venerable Benjamin Beddome. This practice he continued for five years, and the last sermon thus taken down was the last the venerable pastor preached; August 23, 1795, from Hosea v. 6. For three years prior to the death of Mr. Beddome, “Master Thomas Coles,” was accustomed to read at the weekly prayer-meetings the notes of the sermons he had taken on the Sabbath. In this he was much encouraged by

his friends, who were gratified by their correctness, and pleased to foster such hopeful appearances in one so young. The more so, as there was nothing forward, assuming, or unbecoming in his manner.

“The earth affords no lovelier sight
Than a religious youth.”

But there is something specially lovely in this spectacle, reminding us of the child Samuel, “ministering before the Lord,” or of Elisha attending Elijah to the last, ready to receive his falling mantle. With deep interest the aged pastor beheld this “branch” growing out of his roots.

Before he had completed his sixteenth year, he had become a member of the church at Bourton. The pleasing incident is thus recorded :—

“August 2, 1795, Master Thomas Coles gave an account to the Church of the Lord’s dealings with his soul—a very acceptable one indeed. He was subsequently baptized by Mr. Francis, and received into the Church on the 16th. On the 24th of the same month, he proceeded to Bristol for improvement for the ministry. A very promising youth. The Lord bless him, and keep him, and cause his face to shine upon him.”

Like some others, separated from their birth to the work of the ministry, he seems to have cherished the expectation from his earliest years. A taste for sermons was exhibited in the notes to which we have just referred. Before proceeding to Bristol, he was very kindly directed and assisted in his classical studies, by the late Rev. William Wilkins, of whom we have had occasion to speak before, as strongly recommending him to the Church at Bourton. At Bristol, such was the respect and affection entertained for him, that Dr. Ryland and the Rev. Joseph Hughes, the president and tutor, soon commenced a friendship with him on intimate and equal terms.

In 1797, an opportunity being afforded him of

completing his studies at Marischal College, Aberdeen, on Dr. Ward's exhibition, he, with the advice of his tutors, and the approbation of the committee, finally left Bristol the next recess. In September, after having preached with much acceptance many times in Bourton and the neighbourhood, he proceeded to Aberdeen, bidding his friends farewell, by preaching from Exodus xxxiii, 15. In Scotland he was zealous in the work of Sunday-school teaching and did not labour in vain. In a letter to his mother he says,

"Our Sabbath evening schools flourish exceedingly, and increase in number. I trust they have been blest to the real conversion of several children. Last night, I had, I believe, the sixth child, who came to me to converse about the great concerns of his soul, under deep anxiety of mind."

He also laboured in preaching in the villages around, and succeeded in collecting a congregation of from 500 to 800 persons. He says:—

"We have opposition and enemies, but less than might have been expected; and, while not many rich, and mighty, and noble, are called, the poor rejoice that to them, the gospel is preached."

In 1799 he accompanied the late Rev. Rowland Hill on a missionary tour, through different parts of Scotland. Such was the esteem in which Mr. Coles was held by many in England, that his return was looked for with much pleasure and solicitude. Spheres of labour were open to him, and invitations were received to visit various churches. The late Rev. Samuel Pearce, of Birmingham, "the seraphic Pearce," repeatedly wrote to him, requesting him to become his colleague. On the death of Mr. Pearce, he received several letters from the church requesting a visit from him; and so importunate were they, that they gave him no rest until he acceded to their request.

Having taken his degree of M.A., in April, 1800, Mr. Coles left Aberdeen with the intention of spending twelve months at Edinburgh, but this was prevented by the state of his health. After spending a short time with his mother at Bourton, he proceeded, in June, to Birmingham, where he remained till the end of August. He says :—

“ I found the people, throughout the whole of my time there, very friendly and affectionate, and they have given me a unanimous invitation to return for nine months, willing, if I still determine to go to Edinburgh, to wait until the expiration of that period ; but I have for a considerable time been in a weak and languid state of health, and very frequently unfit either for studies or bodily exertion.”

Subsequently, he says :—

“ I have been obliged to put a negative on Birmingham. It was the uniform opinion of all who best know my constitution, that it was inadequate to such a station. May the Lord bless and supply them. I feel much for them, and scarcely hope to meet with a people to whom I shall be more attached, or with whom I shall be more happy, had Providence permitted I might have been among them.”

Still, the church in Cannon Street did not lose sight of him ; but, hearing of his improved health, repeated their solicitations.

Having spent a few weeks at Bourton, in the following December he complied with the earnest request of Mr. Booth, in taking a share of the services connected with the church in Prescott Street, London. He subsequently received a unanimous invitation to become assistant preacher to Mr. Booth, which he accepted. What followed is known to the reader, who probably is somewhat less at a loss to account for the anxiety of the people of Bourton to secure the services of the Rev. Thomas Coles.

We know who hath said—“ A prophet hath no honour in his own country,” and we know also that

“there is no rule without an exception.” Here we have a happy exception. Very few can fully enter into the feelings of Thomas Coles on that ordination day. Had not the form of Benjamin Beddome been ever in his eye in that ancient house of prayer? And was it not the type of all that was venerable, and sacred, and almost awful? Who does not remember with what peculiar sentiments of awe and reverence he regarded the first minister he ever knew, especially if that minister were an aged man, reverenced by his father and mother? Benjamin Beddome was a big-wigged old gentleman of seventy when Thomas Coles was first taken to chapel, and solemnly assured that he must be a good boy or Mr. Beddome would look at him. And would he not from the pulpit even see that corner, hard by the table-pew, in which he sat and wrote down Mr. Beddome’s sermons? Oh, it was a delicate and arduous task, and his friend, Dr. Ryland, sought to encourage his heart and strengthen his hands by pointing to One who alone could effectually help him. The transition from the pew to the pulpit, in the same sanctuary, is a very affecting one, and yet, it is very pleasing; it is more than a compliment to the individual selected; it is doing him the highest honour, and presenting the best testimonial to his sterling worth.

Mr. Coles felt that he was really at home—that he dwelt among his own people. His prospects were cheering, and beyond his expectations discords in the church were buried. Like Mr. Beddome, he became united by marriage to a member of his own congregation. January 28th, 1802, he was thus united to Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of the late Thomas Kyte, Esq., then occupying Slaughter Farm. Thirty-four years Benjamin Beddome was permitted to possess Elizabeth Boswell, and thirty-

four years Thomas Coles was permitted to possess Elizabeth Kyte. But we are anticipating—we have yet to ascertain how the great work of the ministry succeeded during all those happy years.

The year 1802, in the history of the church at Bourton, is distinctly marked, and presents a pleasing contrast to the “troublous times” that went before. The Lord had turned again the captivity of his people, “as the streams in the south,” and their mouth was “filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing.” April 2nd, it was agreed to revive the missionary prayer meeting, to be held on the first Monday in every month. On the 21st of September following, a meeting of ministers was held at Bourton, for the purpose of forming the “Oxfordshire Baptist Association.” To this meeting, a letter was addressed containing the following statements:—

“When Mr. Coles came, we were forty-seven in number. Three were added to us in May, and fourteen are now proposed for communion. We have a pleasing expectation that others will follow. These, amongst other things, encourage us to hope that the thick clouds in which God has justly veiled himself, for our backslidings and misimprovements, are dispersing; and that he will condescend once more to be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us.”

The fourteen persons mentioned above were baptized on the 3rd of October following, and a singularly happy day it must have been. Some of the circumstances are very unusual. Referring to these, Mr. Coles, writing to his friend, Mr. Page, of Bristol, says:—

“Guess, at my feelings, if you can, at baptizing at the same time a wife, a sister, and a brother. God was with us of a truth. Smiles of gratitude and joy appeared on every face.”

That brother still survives—Mr. Robert Coles, of Winson.

In 1803, the Association (formed at Bourton, September, 1802) met at Oxford. The letter from Bourton contains the following pleasing statement:—

“ Since your former meeting, the Lord has added seventeen to our number (the fourteen mentioned last year as proposed, and three besides), most of these, however, had been some years before brought to God, but were prevented coming forward by the very unhappy condition of the church.”

One (Thomas Kitchen) spoke of a sermon preached twenty years before by Mr. Beddome, as the means of his conversion. He had never so much desired baptism as since he witnessed the baptism of fourteen persons by Mr. Coles, October 3, 1802. On that occasion he “ wished himself among them.” He, with two others, was baptised, April 3, and the most striking incident in connection with this service, was the contrast in the ages of two of the candidates. Thomas Kitchen was seventy-five, and Elizabeth Wood sixteen years of age. “ We sang,” says Mr. Coles, “ the following verse:—

‘ To thee, the hoary head
Its silver honours pays ;
To thee, the blooming youth
Devotes his brightest days ;
And every age their tribute bring,
And bow to thee, all-conquering king ! ’ ”

The Church now contained 67 members.

In 1804, they report no additions, but 3 lost by death, reducing the numbers to 64. In 1805, they report 3 added by baptism, and 1 by letter ; and 3 lost, 1 by death, 1 excluded, and 1 withdrawn. In 1806, they report 9 baptised, and 2 deceased, raising the number to 71. In 1807, 8 added by

baptism, one by letter, and three lost by death. Total 77.

In this year, August 28th, the Church was deprived by death of Mr. William Palmer. He had been twenty-six years a deacon of the Church, and so used the office as to purchase to himself a "good degree." His pastor says, "he was a steady friend to the spiritual interests of Zion, and long had the chief management of its temporal concerns, which he was ever solicitous to transact with diligence and fidelity." He had witnessed many, and painful changes. He had been in the vessel of the Church during a most tempestuous and trying period. The wind (like the Euroclydon) seemed to blow from all quarters. They were "exceedingly tossed with a tempest." It was a dark and dreary time ; and all through that season William Palmer was at the helm. There were some who did not fail to attribute all their disasters to his want of skill. Painful position ! But he lived through it. He had "faith in God." He believed that (not Cæsar but) Christ was on board. Right glad was he to perceive the return of fair weather. He knew how to prize the blessing of peace. Shortly before his death, he recorded his sentiments and wishes, intermingling a few weighty counsels to his brethren. The veritable paper is preserved in the Church Book. Having spoken of himself, he says :—

"As to the cause of God and of Christ, it is in safe hands. He will take care of it as his own. As to my dear and honoured Pastor, Mr. Coles, I wish him all possible success in his ministry, in the building up the Church here, and in the conversion of sinners at home and abroad, and to live in love with his people, and they with him. As to the Church at large, I wish them love, unity, and peace, that they may strive together for the faith of the gospel, and for peace with one another. Especially to love, serve, and fear to grieve one another, as also their dear minister, who, in love labours

for their souls' good and prosperity. As to the deacons of the Church, that they may join heart and hand, in filling up their place more to the glory of God than I have done—where I have erred, may they take warning, and learn wisdom, and abundantly excel unworthy me. When new officers are chosen, may they be such as are humble, tender-hearted, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. That this Church may be increased, and peace rest on and with this part of God's Israel. 'See that ye fall not out by the way.' Strive, my dear friends, to live in love and peace. And may the Lord help you to speak often one to another. Keep up prayer-meetings; don't cover sin in any one, neither 'make a man an offender for a word.' Let your light so shine before men, that your heavenly Father may be glorified. The eye of God is upon you; the eye of Satan and of the world is upon you—be watchful. Farewell.

"Your friend and well-wisher,

"WILLIAM PALMER."

Thus died this good and honoured man, in the eighty-second year of his age.

The years of which we have spoken, judged by the additions to the Church, appear to have been the most successful period in the ministry of Mr. Coles. But is this test a true one? Is there not something fallacious and misleading in it? Did not he himself repudiate the notion, that the earlier additions were the fruit of his ministry? "Herein is that saying true, one soweth and another reapeth." Looking over the whole period of Mr. Coles's ministry, we find considerable inequalities as to additions to the Church by baptism. That ministry covered nearly forty years, and of these, there were *nineteen* in which no baptism occurred. Twice an interval of five years occurred between baptismal services, viz., from 1819 to 1824, and from 1830 to 1835. Each of these periods of barrenness was followed by a large addition. In 1824, fifteen were baptized, and in 1835, sixteen. The total number baptized by Mr. Coles, was 132. He himself records the fact, that Mr.

Beddome in 55 years baptized 250 ; giving an average of about $4\frac{1}{2}$ per annum, while the average in his own case was about $3\frac{1}{2}$ per annum. If this comparison be thought unfavourable to Mr. Coles, we must remind the reader that a separate Church had been formed at Naunton, and also at Stowe, while a similar change had occurred at Hook-Norton, and at Chipping Norton, at least to the extent of preventing the necessity of coming from those places to Bourton for the enjoyment of Christian ordinances. A somewhat similar change had occurred too at Milton and Burford. At the latter place in Mr. Beddome's time there was a Pedo-baptist, but no Baptist Church.

From Milton, many came to be baptized by Mr. Coles, but not to become members of the Church at Bourton-on-the-Water. They came simply "*because there was much water there.*" When these facts, and many similar ones, to some extent growing out of them, are considered, the average in the latter case seems to compare favourably with the former. The open field had been enclosed. The opportunity was narrowed, and while the harvest was greater, it was gathered into more than one "*barn.*"

The number of members of the Church when Mr. Coles entered upon the pastorate was 47. On the day of his death the number was 100. It had never until that time exceeded 93. The summary of gains and losses may be stated in few words. During the forty years, 132 were received by baptism, and 14 by dismission from other Churches ; 68 were lost by death, 21 by dismission to other Churches, 4 by withdrawal, and 4 by exclusion.

What great and solemn changes are thus set down ! What hopes and fears, what joy and sorrow are covered by these few words ! What a mass of immortality is seen changing hands ! And there were

other changes, not always of this solemn and stupendous character, which nevertheless deserve to be noted as we pass—incidents interesting in their “own order.” In 1808 the Association met at Bourton. It had made an interesting tour among the Churches, and returned, after an absence of six years, to the place of its birth. On that occasion, the Rev. Messrs. Stennet, of Coate; Thorpe, of Bristol, and Hinton, of Oxford, preached. By the way, a stranger might almost have thought it was designed to be an Association of Smiths. There were but ten ministers present at its formation in 1802, and four of them were Smiths, viz., Smith, of Shipton ; Smith, of Alcester ; Smith, of Blockley, and Smith, of Burford.

On the 1st of October, 1812, the Rev. William Wilkins was suddenly removed by death. He died at Bourton in the sixtieth year of his age, having been a minister of the gospel nearly 40 years. After the close of his ministry at Bourton, he preached for some years at Cirencester, and during the last few years of his life, had regularly supplied Stowe and Naunton. “While those,” says Mr. Coles “among whom he stately laboured, have lost their spiritual instructor, a great many at Bourton, and in its vicinity, have lost an adviser, a benefactor, and a friend. Mr. Coles spoke at the grave, and the Rev. W. Gray, of Chipping Norton, preached the funeral sermon to a very large congregation, from 1 Cor. xv. 42.” Only eight days before his own decease, Mr. Wilkins had preached the funeral sermon at the interment of Mr. Kyte, of Slaughter Farm, the father of Mrs. Coles. Speaking by the grave, he remarked with great solemnity and emphasis—“The next may be you,—it may be *me*.”

CHAPTER VIII.

Bourton and Stowe separated—Auxiliary Missionary Society
—John Foster—Resignation of Mr. Coles—Withdrawal—John Charlewood—Revs. B. S. Hall and John Trafford. (1812—1837.)

AN agreement relative to Stowe and Naunton had been arrived at, and acted upon, some years before this event occurred, but now it was more solemnly and publicly recognized and ratified.

“MEMORANDUM.

“*Stowe, Nov. 4, 1812.*

“We, whose names are hereunto annexed, members, subscribers, and attendants at the Baptist Churches at Bourton, Naunton, and Stowe, do agree to adopt the following plan, and to recommend it to our fellow-members, subscribers, and attendants, relative to the final separation of the said Churches, and the providing a proper minister to officiate at Naunton and Stowe, viz.:—

“*First.* That Naunton society shall consider itself as dismissed from the Church at Bourton, and shall have no claim whatever on its funds.

“*Second.* That Stowe society shall consider itself as separated both from Bourton and Naunton, but as under a friendly obligation to accept such minister as shall be approved at Bourton, provided he is willing to conform to the general mode adopted by the late Mr. Wilkins, of allowing persons baptized in infancy as well as in riper years, to attend at the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper.

[Signed]

“THOS. COLES,
“J. N. WILKINS,
“WILLIAM ROWLANDS,
“JOHN WOOD,
“RICHARD FARMER,
“R. GORTON,
“J. Hill.

“The above agreement was publicly read to the Societies at Bourton, Naunton, and Stowe, and received their universal approbation.”

On Tuesday, September 19, 1815, an Auxiliary Missionary Society was formed at Bourton, for the district of the "Oxfordshire Association," and places adjacent. On that occasion, the late Rev. John Foster preached in the morning from Matthew vi. 10. Mr. Hinton, of Oxford, gave a report, and delivered an address on the progress of the Baptist Missionary Society, and on the object of this auxiliary. "The whole was highly interesting and animating." Mr. Winterbotham preached in the evening, from Psalm lxxii. 19. The congregations were very large, and the collections amounted to *forty pounds*. This appears to have been a very joyous occasion. Mr. Coles says: "The day was crowned with mercy and grace."

That mighty man of valour named above, "The late Rev. John Foster," had taken up his abode at Bourton, in the year 1808, on the occasion of his marriage with Miss Maria Snooke. To her, previous to their marriage, he had addressed what Mr. Gilfillan calls those "illustrious love letters," which now constitute the volume of essays on "Decision of Character," &c., &c., so well known as "Foster's Essays."

"My habits," he says, "in this new residence, are sober, quiet, and recluse, to the last degree. I will answer for it, there is not a mouse that haunts any bank, or brake, or barn in this country, that is seldom seen than I am, or that runs more instantly into its hiding place if it should happen to meet any eye, even that of a cat." And his account of the village is as remarkable as that of himself. "It is," he says, "the one place in the world where nothing can be said to happen in the whole course of the year; nothing, that is, worth telling at the distance of five miles off. This is, perhaps, a very good thing to say of a place, when one considers how much

that is remarkably bad takes place in most other towns and villages. To have nothing remarkable to say of the events of a place where there are a good many people, is surely some proof that Satan is not so active there, as in some other of his haunts. There are several places round at no great distance where a far greater number of notable incidents are constantly occurring to help out the talk and scandal of society. Bourton is hardly good or bad enough to make it worth while that half-a-dozen sentences should be uttered or *written* about it." To this latter assertion, all we have to say is, as the Scotch juries say, *not proven*.

Quiet, and recluse, as were the habits of Mr. Foster at Bourton, the reader must not conclude that he wholly hid himself. He preached very frequently in the places adjacent, though not very frequently at Bourton. He says, "I am become accustomed to pulpits, desks, stools, blocks, and all sorts of pedestal elevations. On reckoning up the number of places in the circuit of neighbourhood at which I have preached since I came to reside here, I find it amounts to *fourteen*—several of them within three or four miles of this village, and several of them as far off as twelve or fourteen miles." Winchcombe is distinctly named. For nine years was this great man the neighbour and the friend of Thomas Coles. To have had John Foster, the writer of "Observations on the character of Robert Hall as a preacher," for a constant or frequent hearer, was an honour which many would not covet, and which Mr. Coles might enjoy without exciting general envy.

That a feeling of respect, ripening into cordial friendship existed on the part of Mr. Foster, and was reciprocated on the part of Mr. Coles, is saying something less, and not more than the truth. Writing to Mr. Hughes, of Battersea, their mutual friend,

Mr. Foster, says: "It is too true that Coles is, as you say, a better man than I am ; I hope to get before him, notwithstanding."

There were some occasions when Mr. Foster rendered great and signal service to the cause of Christ, while at Bourton. In 1812, when the printing office at Serampore was burnt down, two sermons were preached, one by Mr. Coles, and the other by Mr. Foster, the latter from Jer. xlvi. 12—"I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods." The collections amounted to *sixty-five pounds*, and eleven new subscribers were obtained.

In 1819, the Association again met at Bourton. On that occasion, the Rev. Mr. Hinton, of Oxford, preached from 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16 ; the Rev. Isaiah Birt, of Birmingham, from John xvii. 17 ; the Rev. J. Howard Hinton, of Haverfordwest, from Hebrews i. 3.

It will be remembered that, for five years after the above date there was not a single addition by baptism. We are not, therefore, surprised to hear that the soul of the pastor was "discouraged." On Lord's-day, March 7, 1824, a church meeting was called, and the pastor addressed the church to the following effect:—

"**MY DEAR FRIENDS,**

"I have called you together to state, that after a long and painful conflict, I have at length arrived at the full conviction, that it is my duty to resign my office of pastor to this church."

He then added some exhortations and admonitions, and left the meeting, which was closed by one of the deacons.

On the following Lord's-day, the church agreed to send the following note to Mr. Coles:—

"The Church of Christ at Bourton-on-the-Water present

their love to Mr. Coles, and are very sorry that anything should have arisen to occasion the notice he gave last Sabbath, and shall be glad to be favoured with the reasons for the same; and do sincerely hope that they are of such a nature that they may yet be able to remove them, so that they may yet enjoy his labours among them."

Mr. Coles replied in the following letter:—

"Bourton-on-the-Water,
March 27, 1824.

"DEAR FRIENDS,

"Be pleased to accept my sincere thanks for your affectionate note of the 14th instant, in which you request my reasons for the notice I gave you the preceding Sabbath; but, as some of those reasons (I am happy to say) are since partly removed, it may be desirable not to make further reference to them, or to others. I have very deeply felt, and I hope duly appreciated the ardent wishes affectionately conveyed from every quarter, and, I may say, from every individual, who has had an opportunity of expressing them, that I should continue my pastoral and ministerial connection with you. And this, of itself, would make me hesitate as to whether I should be in the path of duty to leave you. Yet, as it is a subject of such importance as to require mature deliberation, I must beg your indulgence for two or three weeks, ere I come to a final decision, which I shall certainly not withhold longer than absolutely necessary. Entreating a continued and special interest in your prayers,

"I remain, dear Brethren,

"Your affectionate Friend and Pastor,

"THOS. COLES."

After this, a petition, universally signed by the church and congregation, was presented to Mr. Coles, of which the following is a copy:—

"To the Rev. Mr. COLES,

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,

"We, the undersigned, beg to express the regret we feel at the prospect of the removal of your ministerial duties from Bourton-on-the-Water, and thus to convey our desire that you will yet continue your labours amongst us. And

it will be our wish to do what we can to render your continuance with us comfortable.

“Signed, &c.”

On Lord’s-day, May 23, the church received the following letter from Mr. Coles:—

“DEAR FRIENDS,

“When I first entered on my pastoral office, it was in my heart to live and die with you. Many painful circumstances have of late years conspired to render it apparently impossible to continue my pastoral relation with any degree of comfort. But, in compliance with your affectionate request, I feel it my duty to remain for the present, in the earnest hope that, in the course of a few months, all unpleasant feeling may have so far subsided, as to give a reasonable prospect that my permanent continuance will, under the divine blessing, conduce to our mutual happiness and spiritual advantage. May the God of peace and love heal every breach, and yet mercifully grant continued and more abundant prosperity. And to these important ends, may He inspire in us all that spirit of Christian circumspection, conciliation, and forbearance, which will not only tend to promote our harmony, but prove so ornamental to our profession. Hoping that the Spirit of grace and supplication may be poured upon us, that we may abound in prayer one for another, and entreating a large and constant share in your intercessions at the throne of mercy,

“I remain, Dear Friends,

“Your affectionate and faithful Pastor,

“THOS. COLES.”

The end of this thing was better than the beginning. Mr. Coles became reassured, convinced that his people prized his ministry beyond what he had imagined, and “he went on his way rejoicing.” How comes it to pass that a minister is allowed to suffer so much while in reality his people respect him, and would deprecate his removal as a calamity? Are there not some who deem it prudent to conceal the fact that they are truly attached to their pastor, “lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the

condemnation of the devil?" They fear to *spoil* the good man, and so never tell their love. Compassionate souls! Are there not others who too much regard their minister as a target? He is the mark, the butt of their hard speeches. How often is a course of conduct pursued which renders the position of the minister unbearable, and when he rises to leave it, these very persons are the first to say, "I never thought it would come to this." There is criminal thoughtlessness touching this matter exhibited far too frequently. We are glad, however, to observe that the course adopted by Mr. Coles resulted in a better understanding between him and his charge, and that his latter years were not thus embittered, but on the contrary invigorated and cheered by the cordiality and zealous co-operation of all his friends. In the autumn of his life and ministry a kind of spring season returned in the congregation, the reward of his patient perseverance through various vexations and discouragements.

In 1827 it became necessary again to appoint two of the brethren to fill the office of deacon, and it is pleasing to find that so unanimous was the Church, that without a single exception the votes were given for Dr. Stenson and Mr. Benjamin Snooke Hall.

"Honour to whom honour is due." It is one of the many peculiar and pleasing features of the Christian religion, that it introduces a new standard by which to test the character and worth of men. Casting aside all else, oblivious of the distinctions of which the world thinks most, it leads us to regard men as great, and worthy of respect, in proportion as they are truly good. Thus it frequently reverses the judgment of the world, and still, in this sense, turns the world upside down. More than one striking illustration of this fact has occurred in the history of this Church. In the last century

there was a Joseph Strange, a poor, but very good man, distinguished by his spiritual excellence, very much respected and honoured while living, and very deeply and universally lamented at his decease. Mr. Beddome speaks of him as a model of Christian consistency. And in the present century there was a *John Charlewood*, known to many who still survive, and who can therefore say whether the witness borne by his sorrowing pastor is true or false. We give Mr. Coles's words :—

“ February 25, 1829. This morning died our dearly beloved and highly respected brother and father in Christ, John Charlewood, aged 87. He was a member originally of the Church at Hook-Norton, and dismissed to this Church in 1773. So that he had been a member here nearly fifty-six years. His character was uniformly consistent and eminently exemplary. He was the first teacher of the Sunday School in connexion with our late brother, Mr. Robert Humphris, continued to teach the children as long as able, and when incapable of doing it at the Meeting House, taught at his own. He had a peculiar and happy gift for instruction, and many scholars through a long succession of years, apparently derived lasting benefit from his labours, which they acknowledged in after life, and still acknowledge. He was remarkable for his facility in taking down the late Mr. Beddome's sermons, which he read for many years at the prayer meetings. His conversation was in a very high degree judicious, spiritual, and edifying, and admirably adapted to prove beneficial to his friends, and to the young in an especial manner. His prayers were instant and fervent, though he often lamented languor and wanderings. He had no transports, but a humble, steady confidence in his Redeemer's blood and righteousness; and this he maintained, and was enabled to express till within a few hours of his departure. He had been deprived of public worship a little more than two years. He was supported by the regular contributions of his friends in the Church and congregation for *upwards of twenty years*, so as never to apply for parochial relief. A very large congregation attended at his funeral. The most respectable of his brethren and benefactors held up the pall, and the children of the Sunday School followed. Mr. Coles preached his funeral sermon in compliance with his

request, from John xix. 30, 'It is finished.' May the event be sanctified to his surviving family, to the Church, and to his pastor, *who deeply feels his loss.*'

A lovely sight was this; a set-off against the world's hard-heartedness and contempt for "*only poor people.*" Weighed "in the balance," it would weigh down a hundred ovations given to conquerors and kings. This was the homage of the heart "looking for nothing again." It was the termination of a tax, the removal of a defendant; yet, says his benefactor, *I deeply feel his loss.* Be encouraged, ye that have succeeded to the work of teaching children; and, as you pass along to your school-room, and reach the chapel wall, let your eye rest on that stone on the left, which informs you, that there rests the body of Robert Humphris, "the early patron of the Sunday school." Perchance, you may think you hear him say, "Be ye steadfast, and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Robert Humphris and John Charlewood originated the Sunday school, and you have succeeded them in the work. Many have had great reason to bless their memory, and if you are faithful, others will bless yours. And though you may not be buried with *unusual* honours, as John Charlewood was, there is One who says—" *Them that honour Me I will honour.*"

In 1830, Mr. B. S. Hall, not long before called to the office of deacon, was dismissed to the church at Burford, in order to become its pastor.

In 1837, Mr. John Trafford was encouraged to devote himself to the work of the ministry. Concerning him, the following resolution was passed by the church very unanimously:—

"Several of our members having heard our brother, John

Trafford, repeatedly exercise his gifts at our prayer meetings, we, as a Society, think he should be encouraged to make application for admission into the Bristol Baptist College; and we thus express our cordial approbation of him as a partaker of personal piety, and of promising abilities."

Mr. Trafford has fully justified the judgment of his friends. After labouring for a while at Weymouth, he became an agent of the Baptist Missionary Society. He is now the president of the college at Serampore, and, Mr. Wenger being witness, one of the best agents the society ever had.

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CHAPTER IX.

Death of Mr. Coles—Reflections by John Foster. (1840.)

WE have briefly indicated some of the changes witnessed *in the church* by Mr. Coles, we must now turn to some of still more tender interest—the snapping of domestic ties, and the quenching of the light that had cheered his house and his heart. Since the day on which he settled at Bourton, he had lost his mother, his brother, five children and his beloved wife. In 1834, he lost his only daughter, at the age of fourteen. This event seems to have inflicted a fatal blow upon her dear mother. “I am grieved,” says the sorrowing husband, “and pained at heart, beyond what my tongue can tell or pen describe, that my dear and invaluable partner, who has been my wise counsellor and only friend, since the death of my dear mother, is gradually sinking in consumption, brought on by inconsolable grief for her beloved and only daughter, whom she is now evidently following to the grave.” Only two years after the death of the daughter, the mother died also. “Then were the days of unleavened bread.” The good man “mingled his drink with weeping.” His “sighing” came before he ate. “His harp also was turned to mourning, and his organ into the voice of them that weep.” Fears were entertained that he must have left the post he had so long and so honourably filled. But the truth taught at his ordination, by Dr. Ryland (“My grace is sufficient for thee”), did not fail him in this “cloudy and dark day.”

His spirit was revived, and he continued to labour, not without many pleasing indications of the Divine favour and blessing. On the 6th of September, 1840, he administered the ordinance of baptism to fifteen persons. Seven of these were from Milton, the rest were about to become members of the church at Bourton. What a gloom would have rested upon the services of that day, had it been known that those who then saw and heard, should see his face and hear his voice no more. Yet, so it was. He had accomplished "as an hireling his day;" the sun was setting in a blaze of glory; and soon the darkness of death would fall upon that joyous scene. There is something peculiarly sad in the surroundings of this event. We say in the "*surroundings*," for the end itself was "peace." We cannot do better than allow Dr. Stenson, his medical attendant, and one of his deacons, to state the fact. He says:—

"Ask you me, as his medical attendant, the occasional cause of his death? I unhesitatingly say, that it was by baptising many persons in an unnatural way, namely, after vigorously and impressively addressing a concourse of people bordering on the river's edge, for half an hour, to the production of extreme heat and perspiration; he then and thus descended into the water, with a Mackintosh dress on, up to his loins, to prevent the admission of water, which occasioned, I conceive, a condensation of the moisture into intense cold, in the most hurtful form; so that he was surrounded, as it were, with a coat of ice up to his loins. On coming out of the water, he complained of deadly cold. No subsequent glow as always felt heretofore. He preached in the morning, and administered the Lord's Supper; preached again in the evening,* evidently lame in ascending the pulpit, crippled in leaving it, and never more to approach it. I saw him the next morning, after a distressing night of spasms of the right leg, and violent inflammation of the same, rapidly advancing to deep-seated and extensive suppuration, which was

* Text in the Morning, Acts ii. 47; Evening, Luke, xii. 8.

speedily followed by distressing spasms of the bladder and the other leg; and, what is remarkable, all that the dress encompassed was affected with violent spasms, and *no part above it*. These symptoms fearfully augmenting, in spite of remedies, eventually induced symptoms of irritation, of which he died. Such were his sufferings, that he could utter but little, and that little most interruptedly. All I could hear him say was, 'Oh, thankful that it is a finished work, a finished salvation!—

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall;
Be thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my all."

"The last twenty-four hours were comparatively easy, and the extinguishing of life like a dying taper. I never witnessed a person suffering more torture from spasms (not even in *tetanus*) all occasioned by administering a Divine ordinance in an unnatural way. One would hope that such a well-marked instance would be a caution to all future baptizers."

The unnaturalness to which Dr. Stenson refers, we need scarcely say, is that of clothing ones-self in Mackintosh. Thus ended* the life of one who had endeared himself to very many. In the "Oxfordshire Association" he was well known, and universally esteemed. With ample means, and a generous nature, he was a benefactor whom the poor have much missed. With a sweet temper, and a sympathising soul, he was a general favourite among his ministerial brethren. Of his pulpit performances, his friends entertain very pleasing recollections. Of these, very few were committed to the press. One specimen we have in a sermon addressed to the students of the Bristol College, almost fifty years ago.

* In the sixty-second year of his age, and the fortieth of his pastorate.

Of his productions as a Christian poet, we have one specimen in the "New Selection," and as a fair exhibition of his *spirit*, we preserve it here.

"Indulgent God! to thee I raise
My spirit, fraught with joy and praise;
Grateful, I bow before thy throne,
My debt of mercy there to own.

"Rivers descending, Lord! from thee,
Perpetual glide to solace me;
Their varied virtues to rehearse,
Demands an everlasting verse.

"And yet there is, beyond the rest,
One stream—the widest and the best—
Salvation; lo! the purple flood
Rolls rich with my Redeemer's blood!

"I taste—delight succeeds to woe;
I bathe—no waters cleanse me so;
Such joy and purity to share,
I would remain enraptured there,

"Till death shall give this soul to know
The fulness sought in vain below;—
The fulness of that boundless sea,
Whence flowed the river down to me.

"My soul, with such a scene in view,
Bids mortal joys a glad adieu;
Nor dreads a few chastising woes,
Sent with such love, so soon to close."

At his interment, Mr. Taylor, of Shipston, preached from Zech. i. 5, and Mr. Hirons, of Milton, took part in the service.

Mr. Foster had been visiting his brother-in-law, Dr. Stenson, at Bourton, a very short time before the death of Mr. Coles, and on the receipt of the mournful intelligence, wrote to that relative as follows:—

"The sad event comes with such a surprise, that one seems hardly able to believe it a reality. To think how I saw him,

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evening after evening, but a few short weeks since! betraying no signs of the infirmities of age; vigorous, animated, and in various activity; a man for whom one was pleased to predict a physical and mental competence for his work, for towards twenty years to come. How strange and striking if, the last morning of being with him, at his cheerful breakfast, some secret prophetic intimation had come into my mind, that by the time I am now writing he would be silent, insensible, and waiting but a few hours to be conveyed to the grave! What a change it would have brought in the silent consciousness of the mind, over every look, and sentence, and tone of his voice! To-morrow, the pulpit will be beheld with a kind of dubious wondering sentiment, that will say, will he really be seen there no more? Have there proceeded thence his final address and final prayer? Will every voice now to be heard there, be a memento, that his, which has been heard there these forty years, is now for ever silent, when there seemed every probability that it would continue to be heard through many years to come, in which many of his hearers would be withdrawn from the congregation and from the living world, leaving him still in the exercise of his ministrations. He was insinuating me a half request to be there at this very day, for the Missionary meeting. What an astounding thing it would have been had there been any inspired seer to say, 'Mr. Coles, you will at that time be in an assembly *elsewhere*.''*

* Foster's Life and Correspondence, Vol. ii.

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CHAPTER X.

Mr. Cubitt—Mr. Statham—Mr. Brooks—Statistical Summary—Conclusion.

In continuing our narrative, it will be seen that the past is so near the present, that as it is the less necessary, so it would be unbecoming to say much. We do not mean to say, or even insinuate, that there are no incidents to form the material of history in these later years—far from it. There are some circumstances possessing peculiar interest, but they are yet “in their greenness,” and, moreover, many of the actors still survive. Some future scribe—say about the year 2060—may possibly bring them forth in their fulness, and by that time they will be “fully ripe.” We shall briefly indicate the course of events as they affect the Church during the twenty years subsequent to the death of Mr. Coles.*

During the month of November, 1840, the pulpit was supplied by the Rev. B. Hoe, late of Montreal, and at the end of that period he was invited to continue his services for a period of six months. On the 9th of May, 1841, the desirableness of inviting Mr. Hoe to take the pastoral office was considered and decided by vote. The result of which was that, 23 said aye, and 22 said no. Under these circumstances, Mr. Hoe very wisely declined to accept the invitation. In the following month, the Rev. James

* In the year 1840, new school-rooms were erected at the back of the chapel. The cost was about £300, which sum, with £50 in addition for repairs of gallery, &c., was raised about the time of Mr. Coles's decease.

Cubitt, of Stratford-on-Avon, was invited to supply the pulpit for a few Sabbaths; after which, he was invited to take the pastoral office, and entered upon his stated labours on the 15th of August.

About this time, Dr. Stenson having resigned his office as deacon of the Church, Mr. Prosser, of Lower Slaughter, and Mr. John Truby, of Little Rissington, were chosen to that office. Mr. Cubitt continued his labours until Michaelmas, 1848, when he resigned his pastoral office. Among the persons who supplied the pulpit at this time was Mr. A. Thomas, then a student in the Bristol College. After having preached on several Lord's days, he was invited to take the pastoral office, which he declined, stating that he wished to continue his studies for a longer period. Soon after this, the Rev. John Statham, of Cheltenham, formerly a missionary in India, was invited to supply for three Lord's days, at the end of which time he was chosen to become the pastor of the Church. Mr. Statham commenced his pastoral labours April 22, 1849. This connection continued until the last Lord's day in March, 1855. On the evening of that day, Mr. Statham preached his farewell sermon, from 2 Cor. xiii. 11. "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." A purse was presented to Mr. Statham containing £32 15s. 6d.

In the meantime, other changes were occurring. In December, 1853, Mr. Prosser resigned his office of deacon, on account of "growing years, and increasing infirmities." "It was then suggested, that a committee to manage the financial concerns of the Church, be appointed from amongst the members and communicants." This committee consisted of J. N. Wilkins, Esq., W. Kendall, Esq., and Messrs. W. Wilkins, W. Ennals, and M. Cook. It was

subsequently thought desirable to appoint others as one (J. N. Wilkins, Esq.), had been removed by death, and another (Mr. Cook), had changed his residence. There were added, therefore, The Rev. B. S. Hall, Mr. Prosser, and E. Kendall, Esq. Various ministers were engaged to supply the pulpit, among whom was the Rev. Thomas Brooks, of Wrexham. He did so on the 27th of May, and the 3rd of June. On the latter date a Church meeting was held, when a wish was generally expressed, that Mr. Brooks should be again invited for a month or six weeks, with a view to the pastorate.

"On the 17th of June," says the record, "Mr. Brooks came amongst us again, remaining over the 24th, and July the 1st, 8th, and 15th. On the 22nd, a Church meeting was held, when with only one dissentient, the Church invited Mr. Brooks to take the pastoral office. A letter of invitation, signed by the members of the committee, was addressed to him, to which he replied in the words following:—

"DEAR BRETHREN,

"I accept, with a profound sense of the importance and magnitude of the interests involved, the invitation you have addressed to me in behalf of the Church at Bourton-on-the-Water, to become its pastor. In doing so, I cannot but be aware of the fact that my position relative to that Church and the surrounding population will henceforth be one of the most interesting, and loaded with the heaviest responsibilities. Its duties will be arduous, and fraught with the most solemn results. Brethren, I will endeavour to meet them in the fear of God, and to discharge them in his strength. I beseech you also to 'strive together with me, in your prayers to God for me.' We must, henceforth, help or hinder each other. Nothing would afford me greater joy than to know that I am destined to render you efficient spiritual service, and so to speak that many might believe; this I will seek to know as we turn the leaves of time."

Shortly after Mr. Brooks entered upon the pasto-

rate, which he did in August, 1855, it was determined to revise the list of members of the Church. The result of this was the reduction of the numbers, from 123, as returned in 1855, to 85. So that while in the year there was a *clear increase* of 7, the Church which in 1855, reported a total of 123 members, in 1856, returned but a total of 92. During the revision, it was ascertained that some who retained their nominal membership, had emigrated; others, had "departed this life." Some of the survivors were advised to have their dismission to other Churches; others, were regarded as withdrawn. The Church now contains, within one or two, the same number of members as it did on the day of Mr. Coles's death.

We will indulge no comparisons between the three pastoral periods which divide these last twenty years—suffice it to say that the rate of increase by baptism is about equal to that of the fifty years of Mr Beddome's ministry.

From 1841 to 1860, 89 have been added by baptism, giving an average of about $4\frac{1}{2}$ per annum. The average, not falling below 4 per annum upon either of the three pastorates. In the Spring of 1858, other members of the Committee having passed away or become incapacitated by age and infirmities, it was resolved to elect three persons to fill the office of deacon.

This choice was made in the most amicable manner, and the votes, with few exceptions, were given for Mr. Edmund Kendall, Mr. Edward Truby, and Mr. Ennals.

Having just noted these changes, and set down these statistical results, we might conclude our task, but there is one enquiry which many will be disposed to make, viz., "Did this Church look only on its own things, or also on the things of others?" Happily we are not left without witness upon this

point. We are aware that a great authority has said of those who glory only in their ancestry, that they are like the potato, the best part of which is underground. We, however, disclaim all such glorying ; still we would glorify God in them, and regard their good works as "ensamples." The deeds of this Church *generally* have been recorded with remarkable minuteness. We do not imagine that *nothing* escaped, for there were periods wherein next to nothing was recorded. In the matter of pecuniary contributions to various objects, we have much interesting information. We can survey a century, and see that during that period the pecuniary contributions of this Church and congregation to various institutions and objects amounted to the goodly sum of £4,556 18s. 2d. Of this sum £1,893 16s. 3d. was given to "chapel cases," including £115 5s. 6d. in behalf of the erection of the New College at Bristol, in 1805. "Chapel cases" we all know have very greatly multiplied since the commencement of the present century. But we find the first cases mentioned here far back in the last century. We have the following :— "1722.—Wooton-under-Edge, £2 8s. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d." "1723.—Bengeworth, £7 6s. 4d." "1724.—Fairford, £4 4s. 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ d." After this none were recorded until 1752, from which time they were recorded until 1848. So that taking the early cases named above, and attaching them to those that follow, we have a century of chapel cases, and find that for that entire period the average is little less than twenty pounds per annum. If we divide the century into decades, we find variations not altogether void of interest, thus :—

1722—1724 and 1752—1758	£28	14	1
1759—1768	49	7	6
1769—1778	72	4	6
1779—1788	139	1	0

1789—1798	.....	100	19	6
1799—1808	.....	392	14	0
1809—1818	.....	258	3	6
1819—1828	.....	188	0	3
1829—1838	.....	304	6	1
1839—1848	.....	156	5	7

The names of persons and places connected with these donations are far from uninteresting. In 1779 Mr. Ryland, being then pastor of the Church in Northampton, obtained £10 toward the building of his "*New Meeting*." In 1788 William Carey preached at Bourton, August 24th, and collected £16 11s. 10d. for his "*New Meeting*" at Moulton. In 1817 the Rev. W. Gray preached, and collected £16 16s. 6d. for the "*New Meeting*" at Chipping Norton.

But in addition to cases of this kind, there was the larger sum of £2,663 divided among a variety of public institutions and cases of individual need. The "*Baptist Mission*" appears in the list from the year 1802. Even the Moravian Mission was not forgotten. The Gloucester Infirmary received repeated contributions. In addition to £115 mentioned above, there were regular annual contributions forwarded to the Bristol College; divers foreign objects received liberal assistance. Serampore, Jamaica, and Ireland, in the day of their distress were each helped with a liberal hand. Aged ministers, whose names we withhold, received annually help from Bourton.* Ministers' widows, too, had their hearts made glad by timely and liberal gifts. In 1807 one such received £30. In 1818 another received a gift of £72 6s. In 1822 another

* One who became a recipient in 1827 received in the course of ten years £70 17s. 6d. The annual sum varying from £5 to £10.

received £21 19s., and many more might be added. In the year 1767, an Indian school having been established at Lebanon, New England, two brethren came and collected for it £30, one of them preaching from Isaiah ii. 2, 3. Nor were our fathers either innocent or afraid of the charge of being "*political dissenters.*" In 1811 they contributed £11 14s. 6d. in aid of the expenses incurred in opposing Lord Sidmouth's bill; and in 1831 they furnished £3 2s. 6d. toward the expenses of the election of Lord John Russell. Nor were they indifferent to the sufferings of their fellow-countrymen, occasioned by the temporary depression of trade. In 1783 the poor at Horsley were in great distress, having no employment, and provisions being very dear. The congregation at Bourton sent them £45.

We must not forget that those of whom we speak had at the same time erected two chapels and a house, kept these buildings in repair, supported their own minister—for many years two at one time—met the expenses incidental to public worship, and assisted their own poor. Nor had they overlooked the cause of education. In addition to a Sabbath school, they had for some years sustained a British school, which in a short time gave rise to a *National* school. How long the appearance of the latter would have been deferred, but for the former, we cannot tell. In a population not exceeding *eleven hundred*, it is clear that there cannot be two large schools, the British School has, however, been kept in existence, without going down to Egypt for help, or trusting in the "*Committee of Council.*" It has been greatly indebted to Mr. James Ashwin, who, having purchased a substantial building which had been used for a few years as a chapel, generously offered the same to be used, free of charge, as the

school-room, and in various other ways has rendered valuable assistance.

Much has been said about the utter inadequacy of the voluntary principle to sustain religious worship, especially in thinly-populated and agricultural districts. We dare challenge the advocates of coercion, to produce a single instance, from a similar sphere, having a similar population, where compulsion has done more for religious institutions, and for the cause of humanity, than voluntaryism has effected in the case now under review. And we are not now speaking of some spasmodic and convulsive effort made with a view to sustain and recommend the "Liberation Society," or to write upon the walls of the Establishment—"Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting." We take a hundred years, in which it so happens that these matters are recorded; we are conducted back to the middle of the eighteenth century; we see these men doing just what religious conviction and sympathy with suffering prompted them to do. And having sustained a "godly and learned" ministry—(fully equal to their neighbours in these qualities)—for themselves, and provided for the preaching of the Gospel in many places around them, we see them generously contributing *four thousand five hundred and fifty pounds* to help the cause of God elsewhere,—giving an average of forty-five pounds ten shillings per annum. To those who would call down fire from heaven to consume such men, or (as that may be thought somewhat extreme) would even throw *cold water* upon them, and exhort them to leave these matters to the "Lords and Commons," we say, with all *due* respect, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."

May the same spirit of holiness and zeal rest upon their children, and their children's children, to the

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end of ages. Our spirit has many times been stirred within us while pondering the records of this Church, long before the thought of making them public had been conceived. And we shall be disappointed, indeed, if these annals have no arousing effect upon those who now dwell in the neighbourhood. Let us all learn to esteem very highly the blessings of peace and concord, and strive to keep them in our midst. Let us live as if we still heard our fathers calling to us, "See that ye fall not out by the way." Call to mind the period of 1795 to 1801. Let it be a beacon to us. And shall not the remembrance of so many who have "passed into the skies," help us to set our affections on "things which are above?"

"They are happy now, and we
Soon their happiness shall see,"

if we be "followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Are there none among us who, while lineally descended from some whose names appear in this narrative, are neglecting the ordinances their fathers prized, and the Saviour whom they loved? You will see in these pages what pangs have been endured by holy men, and all produced by a negligence like yours. The Lord grant unto us that the memory of the fathers may be the means of grace to the children. We meet Sabbath after Sabbath in the midst of their sepulchres, and may soon lie down with them in the dust. Are we prepared to meet them in the skies? Are we so living that a sudden summons would find us quite prepared to go?

"O happy servant he
In such a posture found."

There *will* be a blessed meeting of some among us with the fathers and founders of this Church. There are those among us who are worthy sons of noble sires—emulating, and, perhaps, equalling the holiness and usefulness of any who have gone before them. It is very virtuous with some always to vilify the present. We have no sympathy with such. However sanctimonious their manner, they do much harm. They “quench the smoking flax,” and cause the youths to “faint and be weary.” They appear to think that *croaking* is their calling—at least they attempt no other *good* work with half the zeal they expend on this. Have ye not heard that he who would make men better must make the best of them ?

“Were half the breath thus vainly spent
To heaven in supplication sent,”

The voice of such would soon be changed.

And have we not in the history of this Church abundant evidence of the Divine faithfulness ? When were our fathers forsaken ? Even their afflictions were the fruit of faithful love. What appeared to be a frown of anger was but the graver look of love. How easy now to observe the guiding hand, leading them like a flock. How repeatedly and continually they proved the promise true. They cried, and the Lord heard them, and delivered them out of all their distresses. Days of darkness may still await us. Should they come, let us remember “the days of old.” Our fathers trusted in the Lord, and they were not confounded. He who founded Zion has said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” This is our stronghold. “While the earth remaineth” the Saviour will be heard

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saying to His Church :—“Lo, I am with you alway,
even unto the end of the world.”

“This shall be known when we are dead,
And left on long record ;
That ages yet unborn may read,
And trust, and praise the Lord.”

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